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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE

WORKS BY MRS. CRAIK.

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JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

CHRISTIAN'S MISTAKE.

THE WOMAN'S KINGDOM.

A NOBLE LIFE.

HANNAH.

A BRAVE LADY.

YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

LONDON: HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED.



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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

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BY
THE AUTHOR OF
“JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,”
ETC., ETC.



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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

CHAPTER I.

AN ONLY SON.

“ I THINK, mother, I will go abroad after all ! ”

He who said this, suddenly and just a trifle sharply, had been sitting reading at the farthest end of a very handsome, not to say gorgeous, drawing-room, where a group of four ladies, whose clothes well matched the apartment, sat conversing. For I have no doubt they would have called their talk “ conversation ”—of a highly interesting and improving kind.

The young fellow in the distance, however, did not seem to find it so. He was at that age when men are very critical of women, especially of their mothers and sisters, unless these happen to be sufficiently beautiful ideals to remain such unto son and brother from the cradle to the grave : an exceptional happiness which befalls few ; and it had not befallen Roderick Jardine.

The stout lady who, the instant he spoke, pricked up her ears with a cheerful, “ Eh, my dear ? ” was (eccentric Nature will sometimes have it so) very unlike this, her youngest child and only son—as unlike as it was possible for mother and son to be. Light and dark, fat and lean, large-boned and slender, phlegmatic and nervous—they came of two diametrically opposite

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types, physically and mentally. Morally—yes, there was similarity there; for Mrs. Jardine was a good woman, and Roderick was, as she ceaselessly declared, being very outspoken as to her feelings, the best of sons, though he was a little “peculiar,” like his poor dear father, of whom he was the very image.

This was true. Her three daughters—now married and settled, except the last, who was just about to be—all took after herself. Not her present self, perhaps, but the comely lassie she must have been once—fair-haired, round-cheeked, with a wide mouth and slightly projecting teeth—though possessing sufficient good looks to be a belle in Richerden. Roderick alone “favoured” the other side of the house—the tall, dark, rather sad-looking father, who came of old Highland blood, and not being in business, like most of the Richerden folk, had led a rather retired life, keeping himself very much in the background, even amidst his own family. Nobody really knew him, or thought much of him, until he died, which event happened just before his son went to college.

Since then his widow had gradually blossomed out into great splendour; married her two daughters, taken her independent place in society, Richerden society, as a woman—I beg pardon, a lady—ought to do, who has a large fortune, a fine family, and a great capacity for managing both. People had said that she managed her husband: but those who knew Mr. Jardine questioned this. Gentle as he was, he was not exactly a man to be “managed” by anybody.

“What were you saying, Rody, my lamb?”

Now, if there was a pet name the young fellow disliked, it was his childish diminutive of “Rody.” And no man of five-and-twenty is altogether pleased at being called “a lamb.”

“Can you spare two minutes from that very delightful conversation of yours to listen to me, mother?”

“Ou ay, my dear.”

Roderick winced a little. "Wouldn't 'yes' do as well as 'ou ay'?" But never mind, it doesn't matter, mother dear," added he, with a sigh, more of weariness than impatience.

There are so many things in family life which people never ought to mind, and right-thinking people try to persuade themselves they do not mind. But of all the small sufferings of existence there are few more trying than a continual sense, or dread, of being "rubbed up the wrong way" by somebody whom you are bound to love, nay, do love—in a sort of tender apologetic fashion—that affection without sympathy which becomes at times an actual anguish, instead of a rest and a delight. To conscientious people this is always a sad position, especially when it unluckily happens to parents and children, who did not choose one another, and yet are bound to put up with one another to the last extremity of endurance.

"Honour thy father and thy mother," is a command nobody doubts. "*Love* thy father and thy mother," is a different thing, for love cannot be commanded. Roderick did love his mother, deeply and sincerely; but they were so exceedingly unlike by nature that only her extreme warm-heartedness and his strong sense of duty kept them from drifting asunder—and did not prevent his shutting himself up in a hopeless panoply of gentle reserve, as his father had done before him. For he and his father had been all in all to each other. The world had never looked the same to Roderick since Mr. Jardine died.

I should like to describe Roderick Jardine as he stood reflected in the huge mirror—the drawing-room seemed all mirrors and gilding, with a few pictures stuck in between, large "furniture pictures," as I once heard them described by an Edinburgh upholsterer who was in the habit of providing such for the wealthy inhabitants of Richerden. Roderick was not a "furniture picture," but more like a Vandyck

portrait—tall, dark-skinned, aquiline-featured; the true Celtic type as distinguished from the Lowland Scot. He had also slender, well-shaped hands and feet—another Celtic peculiarity—and dark eyes, which practical people might denounce as “dreamy.” A long, soft, black beard, which had never known razor, completely hid his mouth; which fact had been a real comfort to him, as it is to many born with a sensitive and nervous temperament, which it is the effort of their lives to overcome, or at any rate to conceal.

Such was this young man—not at all a young man of the period, since he neither smoked nor drank, betted nor talked slang. Yet that he was really a man, the other “men” of his college had pretty well found out by this time. Quiet-mannered and refined-looking as he was, nobody attempted either to tyrannize over him, or to take a liberty with him—not even his own mother.

“Rody, my boy,” said she, coming to him half deprecatingly, “were you saying you wished to go abroad? It’s late in the year, to be sure, but I’ll not hinder you. Only you must promise me not to be climbing up Alps and tumbling into glaciers.” *Glaziers*, she called them; and her voice had the high-pitched shrillness which Richerden ladies seldom quite get out of, even when they fancy they have merged their native accent in the purest of English. “Wherever you go, remember you must be back in time for Isabella’s marriage.”

“Certainly—and, mother, don’t be afraid of my tumbling into a glacier, or of an avalanche tumbling down upon me. I shall only see the Alps at a distance. At this time of year one must content one’s self with towns.”

“That’s hard, laddie, when you are so fond of the country. But do as you like—do as you like, only don’t forget the marriage. You will have to give away the bride, Rody.—Ah! your poor father!”

The widow's eyes filled with tears. If she had not understood her husband, she had loved him—and more perhaps after his death than before it.

“Girls, for all your persuasions, I would never have put off my black gowns if it hadna been for Bella's marriage. I hope people will not think I am showing any disrespect to poor dear Mr. Jardine,” added she, relapsing, as she always did in emotion, to the broad speech of her youth, now toned down into an accent just a degree stronger than that of her daughters.

“Mamma, nobody could ever imagine you forget papa,” said the eldest, with a glance at the only remembrance left of him—a mere photograph—for “papa” had always refused to be painted, though likenesses of his wife and daughters, in startling costumes and varied attitudes, adorned the room.

The portrait stood, scarcely more silent than he had been in life, regarding his affectionate and loquacious household; a grave, stately Highland gentleman—every inch a gentleman. How he came to marry into the Paterson family was always a mystery, and remained so. Not for money certainly; he had a small patrimony of his own, and was, besides, a man who cared little for wealth, having amidst his wife's luxurious style of living maintained the very simplest tastes, so simple that she, with her love of show, had been often aggravated thereby. Nor was it a marriage for position; his was much higher, socially, than hers. Could it have been for love? Certainly, during all the long years of their married life, he had never given her, or the world, reason to suppose that he did not love her. At last he died, and the secret, if secret there were, died with him. It was best so.

“You may think thus, girls, but Rody would not, I am sure,” replied the mother, in a complaining voice. “Rody always thinks different from us all.”

“Mother,” said Roderick, with that look in his eyes which was so like his father's—sad, tender, half-

reproachful, and yet with a sweet appealingness, as if so long used to be misunderstood that he had learned to pardon it and pass it by—"mother, indeed I see no objection to your dress; and, if you would like me to stay at home, I will. I have done with Cambridge, you know, unless I cared to go in for a fellowship, which I do not. Shall I put off going abroad till spring, and we will then go together, you and I, to Italy, Greece, Egypt, perhaps even ending with Jerusalem?"

"Oh, preserve us! such a journey would kill me. Fancy me on the back of a camel, crossing the desert, and not getting anything to drink—not even cold water, though I don't like water, even your poor father could never persuade me to it, you know. Nothing like a good glass of sherry, or even a wee drap toddy. I beg your pardon, my dear boy. I know it vexes you that your mother does not give in to your odd ideas. But never mind, Rody. Go where you will, and do what you like; only take care of yourself, and don't forget your old mother."

He was not likely, while there was that sweet expression, "the kind look that's in her e'e," as Burns puts it, implying the strong personal devotion which is to men in all relations of life most alluring, and, as in this case, makes amends for many contrary things; things absolutely inevitable, as the son often said to himself; and tried to think of his mother's early education, or no education; nay, to remember as kindly as he could the old grandfather, once a working blacksmith, who had made such heaps of money in the iron line that his only child was able to marry a gentleman and become a lady.

But old Paterson remained exactly as he was. All his horses and carriages, his splendid house and magnificent dinners, could never make him anything but honest Sandy Paterson, well-meaning and kindly, but utterly uneducated, boastful, imperious, coarse of speech

and manner, with an extreme delight in good eating, and—must it be confessed? only nobody minded it much at Richerden—good drinking.

Nevertheless the old fellow had his fine points, and his grandson knew them; but, now that he was gone, Roderick never spoke more of him than was quite necessary. It was not unnatural. Reverence, like affection, does not come by instinct, or with blood; and there is a vast difference in one's respect for the man who has made himself, and the man who has only made his money.

I am playing chorus to my story in a most digressive way, but it was necessary. Beginning a tale is like entering a family. Some households express themselves so potently that in the first half-hour the visitor is acquainted with all their characters and ways; in others the under-currents run so strong that it takes weeks to find all out, and be able to form a fair estimate of persons and things. Had I described literally, without comment, the scene in Mrs. Jardine's drawing-room, it would have conveyed an utterly false impression, as false as that we sometimes carry away from many a house, and which unconscientious writers are tempted to make amusing stories out of. It is so easy to laugh at follies, to mock at weaknesses, to condone agreeable sins; but to trace the root of these things, and to believe that all our neighbours are, if occasionally worse, often a good deal better than we suppose them, is quite another matter.

This is why, instead of letting the Jardines speak for themselves, I have at first spoken for them: but there is no need to do it any more.

"Well, we'll talk the matter over another time," cried Roderick, who saw looming in the horizon that cloud of "conversation" under the shadow of which he had often shivered, when his clever mother and somewhat feeble sisters discussed a thing for hours together in every conceivable shape, and came to no

conclusion after all. "At this moment I'm busy—I mean, I—I have an engagement. Good-bye, everybody. I'll be back at dinner-time."

"A little before dinner-time, please, my dear. Remember we have company—twenty at least—a regular dinner-party."

"Oh! yes, a 'meeting of creditors,' as my father used to call it," said the young fellow, somewhat bitterly. "No fear, mother; I'll be back in time, and do my duty to all the old fogies."

"They're not old fogies; there are some as nice girls as you could wish to see, if you'd only look at them, Roderick," said Bella, who, going to be married herself, quite lamented that her only brother seemed determined against matrimony.

"Well, I will, Bell, I promise you, only let me go now." And snatching up his hat—a Glengarry bonnet which he persisted in wearing, though his sisters told him it made him look like the Highland porters at the quay—he fairly ran away.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE TURN OF THE TIDE.

ONCE out of the house, Roderick began again to breathe—if one could be said to breathe in that dense and murky atmosphere which hangs over Richerden, with very exceptional intervals, from October till March. And he had become used to English skies, English views and ways, the stately surroundings and old-world quiet of English university life. Richerden, with its oppressive atmosphere, its dirty, noisy streets, where rich vulgarity and squalid poverty so closely

alternated, was becoming to him not merely repellent, but obnoxious. He felt he should soon begin to hate it, long familiar as it was, with the fierce hatred of youth, which cannot see the other side of things, nor believe that to everything there is, there must be, two sides.

Rapidly the young fellow walked on through park and square, through street and wynd, or "vennel," as such dreary dens are often called here; shrinking from and detesting alike the poverty and the riches, the splendour and the rags. It began to rain heavily, but he heeded not. Though brought up in luxury, he was not luxurious by nature, could stand a good deal of hardship, and had a young man's instinctive pride in "roughing it." Still "an even down-pour," as his mother would have called it, is not an agreeable thing; and as in reality his only "engagement" was with himself, whose company he felt free to enjoy as much as anybody else's, he stopped his walk and turned into a railway station, where at least he could sit down quietly and read his letters, which he had snatched up from the hall table on going out.

But having no very interesting correspondence—for he had left behind at Cambridge few intimates and no duns, also being, I fear, of a rather dilatory turn of mind, and given to the bad system of *laissez-aller*—Roderick left the letters unopened in his pocket, and sat idly watching the passengers gather for a train just about to start.

The town—or city, its inhabitants call it—of Richerden, has one great merit: it is a capital place to get away from. Trains at all hours and in every direction will carry you from it into as glorious a region as you need wish to see on this side Paradise—nay, I have sometimes thought Paradise itself may be a little like it. Roderick had done the same in his childhood, always associating it with the land of Beulah, the "everlasting hills," and the river spoken

of in Revelation, as "flowing from the throne of God."

His young imagination, materializing and yet idealizing everything, could not imagine aught more beautiful than this river and those hills, as they looked sometimes, and had looked ever since he could remember. When a mere baby, old enough to escape his nurse, but still small enough to be carried in the father's arms, he had often been taken by that tender father, in a boat or train, for a day's holiday together. How they had enjoyed it! hiding themselves in heathery solitudes, by silent glens and merry burn-sides, dining off oat-cakes and milk, bought at some cottage, or bread and cheese, carried in the paternal pocket, the taste of which seemed more delicious than all the grand dinners eaten now-a-days.

Afterwards, when Roderick grew to be a big boy, it was just the same, only, instead of playfellows, they were companions—his father and he; for there was between them that which is the root of the only true and permanent relation between parent and child—entire respect on both sides. Mr. Jardine had the rare quality of not only loving but *respecting* childhood—its innocence, its keen sense of justice, its passionate and yet sensitive affections. In all their intercourse Roderick could call to mind no instance of his father having been unkind, or, worse, unfair to him. Their life together had been one of entire confidence and pure delight from beginning to end.

Too soon had come the end—the cruel blank: and though, in the strong interests of his college life, he had somehow got over it, and felt no longer a boy, but a man, still, *On revient toujours à ses premiers amours*. So sighed this sentimental fellow of five-and-twenty; and thought when he was five-and-seventy the sight of the river and the hills would be dear and delicious still. And when he heard the guard calling out the name of a place where he and his father had spent

many a happy day, on a sudden impulse he sprang into the train without a ticket ("just like Rody, silly fellow," they would have said at home), and was borne away.

Away, out of the smoke and fog and soaking rain ; away, mile after mile along the shore of the gradually widening river, till the hills began to show their distant outlines, vivid and lovely as mountains always look after rain, especially in October. Nowhere is such heavenly clearness, such spiritualized sunshine, such delicate and delicious colouring of earth and sky, as is often seen in these regions during the month of October. It felt to Roderick, who, after the long vacation, had patiently shut himself up with his mother and sisters at Richerden—for weeks, like coming out of this world into the next—that heavenly country to which, consciously or unconsciously, we all look for the healing of many mortal woes.

He had none, though he often thought he had : but he was of that sensitive and poetic temperament which rather enjoys sadness—in the distance. As he swept along in the train, and, quitting it, started on an old familiar walk, along high cliffs which gave him a view of the country—land and sea—for many lovely miles, Roderick's heart was very full.

Not only of his father, but of himself and his own future, which lay before him like a map ; the map of an untravelled country—untravelled, but yet not undiscovered, for there were in it more certainties than lie in the lot of many young men of his age. He knew he would be well off, even rich ; would never need to earn his bread unless he wished so to do ; and would always be able to indulge any pleasant tastes, of which he had many ; being, though not exactly a genius, of that appreciative nature which is next door to genius, and, combined with hard work, often does duty for it, not unsuccessfully.

Also, he could marry as early as he liked, the only

difficulty being to find and choose the "fair and inexpressive She," who had not as yet expressed herself in any way. The queen of his soul was yet *in nubibus*. He had never in the least compromised himself with any of the young ladies he met. Indeed, he found them all too much of "young ladies" and too little of women for his taste, and so was as perfectly fancy-free as any young man can be who has an ideal mistress clearly defined and painted in his head, to whom he is ready to bring all the devotion of his heart, if only he is lucky enough to find her.

Towards this unknown damsel he felt something like Endymion on Latmos' top before the moonrise, and had already painted several ideal portraits of her in oil and water-colour, and written a good many sonnets to her; but, fortunately for himself and the world, neither portraits nor sonnets had ever been exhibited or published. Nevertheless, alternating with the dear remembrance of his father, which hallowed every beautiful thing that they had shared together, was this dream of a lady—his future wife—whose sweet companionship was to perfect all life for him. What he was to do for her, I am afraid, never entered his mind. The whole thing was to be pure felicity—his felicity, of course. As to hers, *cela va sans dire* (Roderick liked French phrases, and was rather proud of his familiarity with the language, acquired through several walking tours in Normandy and Brittany), of course she would be happy—with him for her husband!

Poor fellow! so young, so ignorant of life and its burdens. Yet he thought himself both wise and old, and felt his burden very heavy indeed, and himself a most unfortunate fellow, on being obliged to go back to that "meeting of creditors" which he detested.

"But I'll enjoy myself here to the very last minute," thought he, and sat down on a heather bush—for on that high ground everything looked as dry as if it never had rained, and never would rain again, till the

next time, which would probably be within twenty-four hours. Wrapping his plaid about him, he felt perfectly happy. That lovely outline of hills—he must just put it down; so, hunting in his pocket for the pencil that was always a-missing, he turned out the letters which he had crammed in there, and looked them over.

None attracted him, except a black-edged one; which, opened, he found was one of the “intimations” of death, customary in Scotland, acquainting him that there had died “at Blackhall, aged sixty-nine, Miss Silence Jardine.”

Silence Jardine! Surely a relation. Who could she be? For he had understood that his father and he were the last of their family.

However, thinking a minute, he remembered that in the business arrangements after his father’s death, which, he being under age, had been managed entirely by his mother, she had told him that Blackhall, the ancestral property, “a queer, tumble-down place, which nobody would care for,” was to be inhabited as long as she liked, by Miss Jardine, a second cousin. This must be she who had now died.

“I wonder, ought I to go to her funeral?” However, consulting the letter, which had travelled to Cambridge and back, he found this was impossible. She must have “slept with her fathers” for some days already. “Poor Cousin Silence! What a queer name, by-the-bye. I wonder what she was like, or if I ever saw her?”

And then, by a sudden flash of memory, he recalled a circumstance which in the confusion and anguish of the time had entirely slipped away—how, not many hours before his father died, there had crept into the sick-room a lady; an old lady, nearly as old as Mr. Jardine, and curiously like him. At sight of her a wonderful brightness had come into the dying face. “Cousin Silence?” “Yes, Henry,” was all they said, but she knelt beside him; and they kissed one another,

and he lay looking at her till the last gleam of consciousness faded away. After that—for he did not actually die for some hours—she sat beside Mrs. Jardine, watching him till the end. And after the end Roderick remembered she had taken his mother out of the room, and comforted her, staying a little while longer, and then leaving; no one thinking or speaking much about her, either at the time or afterwards.

Now, recollecting his father's look, and here, too, the whole story, or possible story, presented itself to the imaginative young man in colours vivid as life, and tender as death alone can make them. And when, carelessly opening another letter, he found it was from the lawyer of this same Miss Jardine, stating that she had left him—"Roderick Henry Jardine, her second cousin once removed"—the whole of her small property, as also a diamond ring "which his father gave me many years ago," he was deeply touched.

"I wish I had known her. I wish I had had a chance of being good to her—poor Cousin Silence!" thought he.

And as he sat watching "the light of the dying day," which died so peacefully, so gloriously over the western hills, he, with his life just begun, pondered over the two lives now ended, the mystery of which he guessed at, but never could know, except that they were safely ended.

Doubtless, he was rather a sentimental fellow, this Roderick Jardine; and there are many fellows of his age, entirely without sentiment, very good in their way. Still they are the sort of young fellows that some people—and, I own, this present writer—would not very much care for.

When the sun set, going down like a ball of fire which dyed the river all crimson, and the sudden grey chill of an October twilight came on, Roderick started up, a little ashamed of himself, and still more ashamed

when he found he had entirely neglected to ask the time of the return train to Richerden.

"Just like me, mother will say!" and half laughing, but vexed, for it always vexed him to vex his mother, he tore along as fast as his long legs could carry him to the railway-station. The train was just going, and it was at the risk of his life—to say nothing of a penalty of forty shillings—that this foolish young fellow contrived to leap into it, breathless, exhausted, having nearly killed himself in his endeavour to "do his duty."

So he represented to himself, at least, and felt a most tremendous martyr all the way to Richerden. It did not occur to him that simply looking at his watch and the time-table would have saved all. But at his age we are so apt to overlook the little things on which, like the coral islands of the South Sea ocean, our lives are built. How far we build them ourselves, or Fate builds for us, God only knows.

Tearing up in a cab to his own door (or rather his mother's—he already began slightly to feel the difference), ringing as if he thought the house was on fire, and being met by the imperturbable butler with the information, "Yes, sir; dinner is served: Mrs. Jardine waited half an hour, and then asked Mr. Thomson to take the foot of the table"—all this did not contribute to Roderick's placidity of spirit. When he at last walked into that blaze of gaslight—that dazzle of crystal and plate—that strong aroma of dainty dishes and excellent wines, and clatter of conversation, which make up a Richerden dinner-party, he was not in the best frame of mind to enjoy the same.

During his father's lifetime these entertainments had been limited; but since, his mother had gradually fallen into the ways of her neighbours, and taken great pride in surpassing them all. She herself, sitting at the head of her very handsomely spread table, looked gorgeously hospitable, beaming all over with

satisfaction, and talking in her somewhat loud but good-natured tones to everybody around her.

Large, comely ; richly, if not quite elegantly dressed ; her broad fair face always a-smile, and her "lint-white locks," with not a grey thread in them—you could not help liking this warm-hearted, good-natured woman, though you might not have wished her for a mother, or even a mother-in-law.

She was so busy talking, and the silver-gilt epergne was such an effectual barrier between the upper and lower ends of the table, that she never noticed how her son-in-law elect quitted his place and her son slipped into it, till the deed was done. Then Roderick might have received a good hearty scolding, not undeserved, had not something in him—was it his father's look?—repressed the ebullition. She merely said, "Oh, my son is there, I see ! Better late than never." And the dinner went on.

Roderick, conscience-stung, which he was rather apt to be, set himself to talk as politely as possible to his mother's guests—the "creditors" to whom she owed a dinner, and felt bound to give an equally grand one in return—nay, a grander, if possible.

Hers certainly was a magnificent "spread," and she watched its progress with undisguised satisfaction. Course after course succeeded each other. There was set before the company about six times as much as they could possibly eat, and ten times as much as they ought to drink, though they did their very best to do both. What else could they do, when everything to tempt appetite and destroy health was lavished upon them with a cruel kindness worthy of Heliogabalus ?

Young Jardine, who was by no means an ascetic, and had the wholesome enjoyment of youth in all things reasonably to be enjoyed, yet felt, though he had been used to them all his life, that there was something in these feasts which jarred upon him extremely—more and more the older he grew. They

were not given from hospitality—it was merely paying a debt owed: nor for friendliness—there was scarcely a person at table of whom he had not heard his mother and sisters speak slightly, mockingly, even contemptuously at times: nor for social and intellectual companionship, since the talk was of the most vapid description, mere gossip, chit-chat, or badinage.

Roderick, who was unfortunately a young man with an ideal, a sense of right, of fitness, of beauty, born in him, and also put into him through constant association with that dear father who had died with his ideal unfulfilled—poor Roderick sat at the end of this uncongenial board, feeling not so much like a death's-head at the banquet as a living man among death's-heads. For what a death in life it must be—an existence whose sole aim was good eating and drinking, splendid horses, and elegant clothes! Not that these things are bad—in moderation—and with something higher beyond. But with nothing beyond?

The young fellow—full of hope and aspiration, with a keen, intelligent enjoyment of life, schemes for making the very best out of it, and yet not wasting it; liking to be happy, and yet liking to make his fellow-creatures happy too, so that he might leave the world better than he found it—felt, at the end of that luxurious dinner, as if he had been feeding for the last two hours on Dead-Sea apples.

When, the ladies having retired, he still had to keep his place and “pass the bottle”—which he loathed—to elderly gentlemen, ay, and young ones too, who evidently did *not* loathe it—listening meanwhile to talk in which, whether it was his own fault or not, he could not get up the smallest interest, this young Cantab, who for three years had lived in what was a little better atmosphere than that of Richerden—socially as well as physically—was a good deal to be pitied.

So was his mother too, when, having succeeded in

luring the gentlemen upstairs, he—her only son—went and hid himself in the back drawing-room and “sulked,” as he overheard her say, lamenting over him as a black sheep, in the loudest of whispers, to a lady he particularly disliked.

But it was not sulking, for he had his father’s sweet temper. It was only the utter weariness of spirit which in uncongenial circumstances comes over the young as well as the old—oftener the young than the old, since these latter see beyond it; the former never do. To them their first despair is a despair eternal.

“How in the world shall I bear this sort of thing!”

Roderick could give it no more definite name. Outwardly, his family life was quite satisfactory—nay, most enviable. He had all this world’s good things at his feet—a mother devoted to him, and whom he loved very sincerely: his sisters, too, though he saw little of them, they were so engrossed in their own affairs, were good and kind. Why was it that home was not home? that he felt infinitely more solitary, more dull, in this gay house than in his two poky college-rooms? that in his pleasant and affectionate family he was regarded—and knew it—something like Andersen’s “Ugly Duck,” whom every other duckling swims away from, and even the mother mourns over and scolds at?

While smiling over the comparison, he blushed; for he was not a conceited fellow, and had no idea of ever turning out to be a swan.

“But I wish they would leave me alone in some quiet corner of the duck-pond,” thought he. “And still more, I wish I could find a creature or two like myself to swim or fly with—wild-ducks I suppose they must be! Oh! if I had any excuse for flying right away!”

And then, with the habit he had of passing over things at the time, and recurring to them afterwards, there came into his mind a sentence in the letter from Miss Jardine’s lawyer, explaining that in making her,

will she had said to him that her only other kindred were some distant cousins, living she believed in Switzerland, whom, if they were poor, she "left to Roderick's kindness."

"Capital idea! I'll go straight to Switzerland and find them. It would at least be something to do."

And the mere notion of this brightened up the young fellow's spirit, and warmed his heart—he was, I fear, but a foolish young Quixote after all: so that, when his mother called him to do civility to the departing guests, he came forward with an air of cheerfulness such as he had not worn all the evening. Ay, even when he had to escort the most honoured guest to the very carriage-door, from an unsteadiness of gait, politely ascribed to gout, but which Roderick, with a contempt so sad to see in the young to the old, even when the old deserved it, soon perceived to be—something else.

"Mother," cried he, indignantly, as he returned to the drawing-room, where the two ladies stood on the hearthrug of their "banquet-hall deserted," hot, weary, a little cross, and not a little glad that it was over—"Mother, I wonder you let that old fellow enter your door! He has not an ounce of brains, and less of manners. Didn't you see he was drunk?"

"What an ugly, vulgar word! And to say it of Sir James, who holds such a good position here, and is Mr. Thomson's father, too! Rody, I'm ashamed of you!"

"And Bella is more than ashamed—angry. Oh! Bell," and with a sudden sense of brotherly tenderness, half regret, half compunction, he laid his hand on her shoulder, "have you thoroughly considered this marriage? Are you quite sure of the young man himself? These things run in families. Suppose he should ever turn out a drunkard—like his father!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Bella, sharply. "And even if Sir James does enjoy his glass—why, so do

many other gentlemen. It isn't like a common man, you know, who never knows when to stop. Now Sir James does. He is not 'drunk,' as you call it, only 'merry.' "

"Roderick," said his mother—and when she gave him his full name he knew she was seriously displeased—"the 'Thomsons are one of the first families in Richerden, and live in the best style. Isabella is making the most satisfactory marriage of all her sisters, and I desire you will not say one word against it."

"Very well, mother." And, with a hopeless sigh, Roderick changed the conversation.

He had the one weak point of gentle natures—he could not endure strife—would do almost anything for peace's sake. Often he let a thing pass—a matter of taste, sometimes almost of principle—rather than hold his own and fight it out. Only when driven to extremity could he really turn at bay, like a wild stag of the forest, and show his sharp horns.

"Mother, have you thought over what I said this morning about going to Switzerland?" asked he, impelled by the sad longing of much-worried people—to run away. "Because since then I have found an added reason for my journey." And he gave her the two letters which had come on from Cambridge. "I suppose you had not heard of Miss Jardine's death, or you would have put off the dinner-party?"

"Why so? She was only a poor relation. Nobody knew anything about her here. Her death was not even put in the newspapers."

"Then you did know of it? But, of course, one could not mourn for a person whose death was not important enough to be put in the newspaper."

Mrs. Jardine looked puzzled, as she often did when her gentle-speaking "lad" spoke in that way; she could not make out whether he was in jest or in earnest.

"My dear, I don't see why we should notice the death of Cousin Silence. It would be very

inconvenient just at the wedding. She was a very good woman, no doubt; but she was only your father's second cousin, though he was always most kind to her, and let her occupy his house at Blackhall for years. Besides, she was a great invalid, though she never made much fuss about it, and hardly ever stirred from her own fireside. When I got the 'intimation' I couldn't help thinking she was well away."

"Yes, well away," said the young man; and, with a young man's chivalric tenderness, he henceforth buried in his deepest heart this dear dead woman, whom he had seen his dying father kiss. But he did not name her again to his mother, or to anybody.

It was quite late that night before he succeeded in explaining to Mrs. Jardine—or in making her at all comprehend the necessity of it—his wish to start off at once to Switzerland in search of these distant relatives, who might be poor, and therefore would have much more right to Miss Jardine's little property than he had.

"I don't see that at all, Rody. She left it to you, and I'm sure it was very kind of her, though you will never want money."

"And they may."

"But why can't you inquire about them—send out a confidential clerk, for instance?"

"That would be a much more business-like proceeding, I allow, mother, and you are the best woman of business imaginable; I know that. But still, 'If you want a thing done, go yourself. If you don't care about it, send.' Was not that my grandfather's maxim? And it generally succeeded."

"Ah! you're a coaxing laddie," said Mrs. Jardine, one of whose fine qualities was an affectionate pride in her clever, low-born father. "Well, go, if you like. But it's just a wild-goose chase; that's what I call it."

"So do I, mother. Only I'm not the hunter; I'm the wild goose, and I want to take a good long flight,

and stretch my wings. Then I'll come back as tame as possible, and settle down in the dullest and smoothest of ponds."

"Oh! I wish you would settle down," said the mother, earnestly. "There's plenty of girls in Richerden—nice girls, too, the Miss Bannermans and Miss Fergusons, and little Maggie Marjoribanks, that's so fond of you!"

"Don't tell me that, mother; you ought not,"—and the young fellow blushed all over his face. "It isn't fair to the girl, or to me. She's a very charming girl, of course, as she has got heaps of money"—again the sarcastic ring in his voice, too sarcastic for so young a man; "but you know I don't care a pin for Maggie Marjoribanks, or any of Bella's fine friends. They're all too much young ladies for me."

"You don't mean to say you want a young person?" answered Bella, satirically. "A dressmaker, perhaps, or a governess, or somebody that earns her own living. Mamma, take care!"

"I don't want anybody. I want to be free. I have plenty to do, and to enjoy also, before I 'settle down,' as you call it. Can't you leave me alone, to manage my own affairs?"

"Ah! do let the poor boy alone!" cried Mrs. Jardine, yawning. "Don't let us sit up talking any longer. Rody, my dear, go where you like, do as you like; please yourself, and you'll please me."

"I have no doubt he will please himself, mamma," added Bella, who dearly liked to have the last word. "And I can imagine the sort of wife he is sure to bring home some day."

"Can you?" said Roderick, biting his lips. "At any rate she will not resemble Maggie Marjoribanks, or you." And then his conscience smote him for the sharp words—he had such a tender conscience always! "Oh, do let me go away, mother!" with almost piteous entreaty. "Perhaps I may come back a better fellow,

so that you have not always to find fault with me, as seems the case now. But I don't mean any harm. Really, the de'il is not as black as he's painted—by his sisters especially.

"Black, my son?" said Mrs. Jardine, fondly, as he bade her good night, and kissed her—he was not too proud to kiss his mother every night and morning still. "You're just the very best son that ever mother had, and so I tell everybody."

"I wish you didn't, mother dear; but I suppose you can't help it." And so, half laughing, yet slightly sore at heart, Roderick sprang upstairs—three stairs at a time—to his own bed-room, where at least he could shut out everybody and everything, and "his thoughts call home" to the fancies and crotchets that pleased him best.

It was a small room, almost in the roof: but he had chosen it, much to his family's surprise and remonstrance, as soon as they came to this grand new house, because from it, on very clear days, you could see right across the park and the suburbs of Richerden to the "blue hills far away," which are the unacknowledged blessing of that wealthy but unsanitary town. Now, in the still moonlight of midnight, with the early snow on their tops, they were plainly visible, if you only took the trouble to undraw the curtains and lower the gas.

Roderick, being a sentimental youth at best, did so, and it comforted him. The vexation of his spirit melted away bit by bit. These were, after all, such mere trifles to be vexed about, when all life, with its grand aims and large ambitions, lay before him—nay, in his very grasp. Talk as they might, his womankind could do nothing. Even his mother had no real power over him. He was of age, and free to come and go as he chose.

As to money—well, it must be confessed, money was the last thing this young fellow ever thought about,

or inquired into. He had a sufficient allowance, paid regularly, and spent honestly, though certainly spent, up to the very last halfpenny, and that was all he knew or cared about it. Blackhall, he understood, was now his own—rather a weight on his mind—and then there was Miss Jardine's touching bequest, just heard of.

In the quiet moonlight, looking at the dim white outline of the "everlasting hills," his mind went back to its musings of a few hours back—over those two finished lives, the real history of which neither he nor any one would ever know. It was all peace now.

He determined to go, the very next day, to visit Blackhall, which he had never yet seen, and knew little about, for his father rarely named it, though it had been the home of the Jardines for many generations. Also, they must have had a burial-place, for he had some recollection of his father having once expressed a wish to lie there, only his mother had overruled it in favour of the grand new cemetery on the outskirts of Richerden, where she had afterwards erected a beautiful white marble sarcophagus with an urn at the top. What matter? Henry Jardine slept well. And far away, somewhere beyond those moonlight mountains—near the very places where they might have played together as children, or walked together as young people—slept also Cousin Silence.

But the waking? If it be possible that the life to come shall heal some of the wounds of this life—oh, the heavenly waking!

CHAPTER III.

ALL THINGS NEW.

RODERICK JARDINE was not, I hope, a worse young fellow than most others of his age, or less soft-hearted. Yet, when he had fairly bidden good-bye to his good, tearful mother—who, he knew well, would do anything in the world for him, except let him do what he felt was best for himself—this parting once over, he breathed more freely than he had done for many weeks. The fogs of Richerden were behind him, and before him was *la belle France*, with its sunshiny climate, and its light-hearted people, who seem to take life so much easier than we do. He, with his Celtic blood, also liked to enjoy life; and, whenever he crossed the Channel, he felt, what Anglo-Saxons seldom do feel—for there is a great mystery in kinship of race—a hearty sympathy for that sweet French politeness, that bright open-air existence, with its simple feeding, its innocent amusements, above all, its kindly gaiety. His heart seemed to open at the first clatter of French tongues on Calais pier, the first gleam of clear French sunshine down the long, level, poplar-bordered roads, the first sight of those queer, heavy-looking carts, with the huge Norman horses, and blue-bloused Norman peasant stolidly following.

“How nice to be really in France again!” thought he, with a sigh of relief—happily unheard by the good mother, driving in her splendid carriage to pay a series of calls in Richerden houses, as handsome and as dull as her own. “I wish I could stay here—at Amiens, perhaps—and spend the whole day in the lovely cathedral. But, I suppose, it is my duty to go right on to Switzerland.”

“Duty” was a rather new idea in this young man’s

life, and he did not dislike it—just for a change. His “wild-geese chase” had resolved itself into a deliberate purpose, or as much so as was possible to his nature, and at his age. He had not been to Blackhall—he hardly knew why, except that his mother had thrown a good many impediments in the way of the journey, so that, perceiving she did not like it, he gave it up. But he had had a long correspondence with Mr. Black, the old factor there, who knew all the family affairs.

From him Roderick discovered that there had been, half a century back, three branches of Jardines—represented by three orphaned children, Silence Jardine, Archibald Jardine, and Henry Jardine, his father. These, all second cousins, were brought up together at Blackhall. Thence Archibald had suddenly disappeared abroad, taking his little patrimony. After many years he was heard of as a “pasteur” in some Swiss canton; no very great change, he having been intended for the Scotch church; and he was said to be married, with a family. But he had never revived acquaintance with either of his cousins, and what were his present circumstances, whether even he was alive or dead, nobody knew.

Still, Roderick had argued, to accept his own little inheritance till he knew his cousin needed nothing, was really impossible. And though Mrs. Jardine reasoned, on the other side, that the money was not Archibald Jardine’s, except conditionally, and to search for him was like hunting for a needle in a hayrick, her more impulsive and romantic son decided that Archibald Jardine must be found, and he, Roderick, was the man to find him. Nor was it so very impossible, seeing that Switzerland—Protestant Switzerland—is not such a very large extent of country, and the name was peculiar; also, by all accounts, the man himself was peculiar too—very clever, very eccentric, likely to have made his mark wherever he settled.

"I'll find him, mother, if he is to be found," Roderick had cried, considerably excited by the quest. It gave him, as he had said, something to do, and (as he did not say, being little given to self-examination) the pleasure was intensified by its being a kindly thing to do. "A few hundreds don't matter to me, and may matter to him. Besides, the thing amuses me."

For, either from caprice, folly, or a certain shyness lest they should discover feelings in him which they could not understand, and might only laugh at, he never pretended to his family that he had any interest in life beyond amusement. His sisters thought Roderick the most unpractical fellow alive; and his mother expressed the utmost astonishment to see him fulfil his duty in arranging all business matters connected with Miss Jardine's will; doing all that was necessary, and even a little more.

Was this, perhaps, because in so doing he had found something to interest him, and deeply too?—the secret of a life which, outside, appeared a mere invalid existence, idle and useless, but underneath was one of the noblest and most pathetic lives the young man had ever dreamed of; wholly unselfish and self-devoted—busy, active, filled up to the last with thoughtful care for others; finally going home, out of the empty world—and not sorry to go home.

"I wonder," thought Roderick, as he looked at the diamond ring, which, though it was a lady's ring, he determined always to wear till he could discover some fair lady to give it to. "I wonder if I shall ever find such a woman to love *me*—a second Silence Jardine?"

Ah, foolish fellow! it was always somebody's loving him that he thought about. He forgot that the great strength of the knights of old was that *they* loved, actively, not passively. They chose some noble lady, worshipped and served her, fought for her, and won her. The man who has will to choose, courage to win, and faithfulness to keep, is almost unknown in modern

chivalry. As rare, alas ! is the woman who deserves to be thus adored.

Roderick sat meditating in this wise—not in the crowded Paris railway, but in the empty carriage between Dijon and Pontarlier—where, in the dim dawn of the winter morning, he found himself on the boundary of Switzerland, a country which he had never yet seen. And, spite of all his notion of “duty,” he was conscious of a lurking pleasure in being thus forced by “business” to realize the dream of his life, and see the Alps for the first time.

As the sun rose and the morning brightened—one of those glorious days of St. Martin’s summer which make all mountainous regions look so lovely—Roderick felt himself growing strangely excited. The country was not unlike his native Scotland, only with the picturesque Swiss cottages dotted here and there. From either window he looked out on green hill-sides and pleasant glens, with dancing burns at the bottom, just as if he had been at home.

“How my father would have liked this !” he said to himself, and sat on the arm of the carriage-seat, watching with the eagerness of a very boy—what was he but a boy still?—for the first glimpse of those “eternal snows” which travellers rave about, and painters paint, and poets sing of, and which he was half inclined to fear would be a great “take in” after all—ay, even when he found himself dashing through the finest bit of railway journey he had ever experienced—the magnificent Val de Travers.

Everybody knows that Pass through the Jura mountains, where you dart in and out of about a dozen tunnels, catching between whiles gleams of the ravine, the wildest Roderick had ever seen, a hill-side sloping up to the very sky, one mass of trees—chiefly fir and oak—whose vivid greens and yellows glowed in the clear sunshine ; and a river boiling below, all spray and foam, whirling round grey rocks in frantic

eddies, and with a noise that was heard even above the puffing locomotive—Nature battling with civilization, and almost winning in the fight.

Yet how grand it was!—every moment presenting a new picture, all the finer, perhaps, that it was so momentary. Roderick could hardly draw his breath for pleasure, and for the vague sense that we have in youth of “something going to happen”—some strange, sweet lifting of the curtain of the future, some passionate entering into an unknown, delicious world.

And when gradually the scene grew tamer, the huge walls of the Pass seemed to lower, and the narrow glimpse of blue sky overhead to widen, his heart beat, his lips quivered; he strained his eyes to see everything that could be seen—above all, to catch the first glimpse of what he surely must be nearing—the lake of Neuchâtel.

Yes, there it was, no mistake about it; a long, wide, calm blue water, like an inland sea; and beyond it, in an almost endless wavy line, every indentation of which was as perfect as if drawn with a pencil, rose, or rather lay—for they were too distant to be more than mere outlines in the horizon—the great white Alps.

Though he was quite alone—or rather because he was alone, or he would certainly not have made such a fool of himself—Roderick sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure—pleasure so keen that it even made the tears come into his eyes. No such sight, visionary yet real, new yet infinitely beautiful, had ever yet burst upon his eyes; eyes so like his father’s—dreamy, tender, passionate, intense—eyes which, from babyhood, had seemed to foretell the whole story of the coming life. If his father—if any one who loved him—could have seen them now, as he watched the scene before him, at once a revelation and a prophecy! Roderick could not say why, but he felt as a young man would feel at the first sight of the face of his first love.

But few young men have a first love, the thing

having been already frittered away into half-a-dozen foolish fancies or flirtations, and fewer still have a love at first sight. So I doubt not Roderick will be much laughed at, as he was conscious he would have been at home. The one person who had never laughed at him, who despised no harmless bit of sentiment, and who hated nothing but what was mean and base—his father—was away. Grown man as the son was, he gulped down a sob, almost like a girl's, to think of the face which, now, he would involuntarily have turned to, to read in it the reflection of his own delight—the dear face which on earth he should see no more.

Thus, with a sacred sadness that was scarcely pain, he found himself nearing the little town which he had often heard about and traced in maps; nay, he once remembered getting the "tawse" on his hand, because, being one of those gentle lads who can be very obstinate sometimes, he would persist in calling it "Neuf-châtel," instead of "Neuchâtel." He had not laughed then; but he laughed now at the recollection. Long afterwards, how strange it all seemed!

The lovely day had faded a little; nevertheless, having settled himself at the hotel, Roderick started out again to see if his beloved Alps were still "découverts," though the "colorization," which the garçon informed him only happened sometimes, did not seem likely to happen this sunset. Still he got a map and tried to find out the outline of the mountains, from Mont Blanc at the one end to the Bernese Alps on the other, before they quite melted into mist, as they did soon melt, and the lake too. But he had seen them—seen the Alps, and he felt as if he had not been so happy for years.

He had to hive all his happiness for private consumption during four of the wettest of days. Never, even in his own pluvius land, had Roderick seen such a deluge as that which shortly swept down upon the poor little town, hour after hour. It was useless to

grumble or scold ; so he sat, laughing at his misfortune, or at the hapless Neuchâtellois who went meekly paddling through the flooded streets. Once or twice he himself sallied out, and took a melancholy wander by the lake-side, peering hopelessly into that abyss of grey mist beyond which had gleamed such a lovely vision ; but he soon came back again, and lounged in the dreary salon, smothering under the close air of the heated Swiss stoves, trying to read a few stray volumes of the Tauchnitz Library, and to persuade himself he was not a very great fool for having visited Switzerland in November, attempting vainly to do what any lawyer's clerk could have done equally well, perhaps better.

For he had only been able to catch one clue whereby he might find his cousin. Mr. Black, the Blackhall factor, a strong Free-church man, had taken some interest in a similar disruption in the Swiss Church, and in one of the controversial writers therein, a "professeur" or "pasteur," or both—the good man's ideas on the subject were very misty—at Neuchâtel. To this M. Reynier Roderick brought a letter of introduction ; but on delivering it found the family were still at their summer retreat in the Jura mountains. So he decided to make the best of a bad business, and amuse himself till they came back. He knew the language—that was one comfort—and he was not of the stolid Saxon temperament, which refuses to take in any new ideas, or to see any perfection in things to which it is unaccustomed. He was a true Celt, impressionable and flexible by nature, ready to love, quick to hate, until the experience of life should teach caution in the one and tolerance in the other. "The world will go hard with you, my boy," his father had sometimes said, half tenderly, half pensively ; and Roderick, shaking his black curls, had only laughed, afraid of nothing.

Nor was he discouraged or afraid now. In fact he

rather enjoyed this dropping from the clouds—oh, what soaking clouds!—into a new place and new people. Not so very new after all, for when, on Sunday morning, he followed the dripping multitude up the steep street which led to the Cathedral—now a Protestant Church—he found everything so like home that but for the language he could have imagined himself “sitting under” his mother’s favourite minister at Richerden. Only when the psalm arose, to a quaint and beautiful tune, and it was a beautiful psalm too, for he read it out of his neighbour’s book beginning—

“Grand Dieu, nous te louons, nous t’adorons, Seigneur,”

it contrasted favourably with the nasal hymns which so tormented him in Scotland. It was sung not badly, especially by one pure, high soprano, a few seats behind, a voice so good that he vainly tried to catch sight of the singer; and in its sweet musical French it seemed to express what he missed so often at home—the sense of cheerfulness in religion. To the last verse—

“Nous n’espérons, O Dieu, qu’en ta grande bonté :
Tu seul peux nous aider dans notre adversité,
Rendre nos jours heureux et notre âme contente,”

the invisible singer behind gave such a pathos that it went right to his heart. The young man, called often “irreligious” by his mother, because his religion lay very deep down, longed earnestly for those *jours heureux*, that *âme contente*, and wondered if by any means he could attain to the like—he, all alone, with nobody to help him to be good, hundreds ready to allure him to be bad.

It was a small thing, one of those trifling incidents which befall us all—only some of us note them and others do not; but long afterwards he remembered it with a strange solemnity, like a person who, believing he was walking his own way, on his own feet, finds

out that hands unseen, unfelt, have been leading him all the while.

Plunging back through the muddy streets “home”—what a ridiculous word!—to the dreary hotel, Roderick made up his mind to give one day’s more chance to the weather, and to the absent Professeur Reynier, upon whom, and his *famille charmante*, the garçon dilated enthusiastically; for everybody seemed to know everybody in this innocent little town. If, on the morrow, it did not cease raining, and some token did not come in answer to his letter and card, Roderick resolved to change his quarters, and try “fresh woods and pastures new,”—take, in short, to pleasure instead of duty, and pursue the search after this vague distant cousin no more.

CHAPTER IV.

“MY QUEEN.”

NEXT day, on rising, Roderick beheld a change! And such a change!

The mist had entirely lifted off from the lake. Its wide bosom lay, still grey, but motionless and clear in the soft dawn. And beyond, their intense purple sharply distinct against the bright amber of the sky, was the long line of Alps. Through one deep indentation, between the Jungfrau and the Fensterhorn, the sun was slowly rising, dyeing the snows rose-colour, and then, as he mounted above the cleft, pouring a sudden stream of light right across the lake—that “golden path of rays” which always feels like a bridge whereon delivered souls might walk—they to us, or we to them—those that on earth we see no more.

Roderick, as he gazed, was conscious of the same sensation which had come over him a few days before—that intuition of approaching fate—bliss or bale, which by those who have it not is esteemed mere fancy, and supremely ridiculous; and even those who have it have need to be rather afraid of it, just as a very imaginative person would be less in fear of the ghosts he beheld than of the ghosts he created.

“*Absit omen*,” murmured Roderick, as, having stood in an ecstasy, watching the gorgeous sunrise, he saw it melt into common daylight, as all sunrises do, in November especially. A dull rainy mist began once more to gather on the distant peaks. “Another wet day after all. Richerden itself could not be worse than this. Shall I go home again?”

But it was so ignominious to go home, having done nothing, seen nothing, that he thought he would make an effort at least to get to Berne and back before the short day closed. And descending, beside his solitary plate at the dreary *table d’hôte* breakfast he found a letter, the daintiest, most politely-worded *billet*, inviting him, in the name of M. le Professeur and Madame Reynier, to pass the evening at their house.

“Six o’clock, and a soirée! What simple folk they must be here!”

But, finding he could be back in time, he accepted the invitation in his very best French, and started off to the railway station on his little bit of solitary sight-seeing.

No one shared his carriage—abroad there is a saying that nobody travels first-class except fools and Englishmen—so he admired all alone the picturesque country which skirts the long chain of lakes; very comfortable, but just a trifle dull. Not that Roderick disliked his own company; on the contrary, he preferred it to that of most people he met—but he had had so much of it lately. It would have been rather pleasant to have somebody to whom he could say that Berne was a most

curious old town, with whom he could have thrown buns to the bears, those important personages, “rentiers” on their own account; still better, when inquiring his way to the Terrasse, and finding the view hopeless, the mountains being again “couverts,” he had to content himself with admiring the river which flows below it, circling the pretty town like a tender arm. Still more would he have liked somebody, anybody, beside him, with whom he could lean over the low wall and argue about the sensations of the man on horseback who leaped down—heaven knows how many feet—without being killed; and what sort of sermons he preached—since, the inscription says, he at once entered the Church, and was a minister in it for many years.

“Suppose I, Roderick Jardine, were to jump down now, just to feel a sensation, or create one—Folly!”

And laughing at himself, and his inordinate vexation at the dull grey day, the miserable mountains, the solitude, everything! he went to feed at a restaurant, and lounge away the time till the return train.

Just before it started, by a sudden impulse, hoping against hope, he walked back to the Terrasse, and turned a last look in the direction of the mountains. One instant—one wonderful, bewildering instant—and then—

“If, after death, I open my eyes in Paradise, I know, I feel, it will look like that.”

Such was the thought which passed through Roderick’s mind—the only thought, for every feeling was absorbed into mere gazing—drinking in through eyes and soul a vision utterly undescribable to those who have never seen it.

The Jungfrau in the sunset, spiritualized by a clear amber glory till it resembles nothing earthly, only that New Jerusalem “coming down from heaven like a bride prepared for her husband”—Roderick gazed and gazed, almost out of himself with ecstasy, thinking of

nothing, seeing nothing, though there was a little group beside him gazing too. But he never noticed them, till, stepping backwards, he came against somebody, and said, "Pardon, madame"—then turned, and saw it was not madame at all—mademoiselle.

She had never observed him—not in the least. Her eyes too were fixed upon the mountains in entire absorption—large, calm, blue, almost English eyes. And her short, curly fair hair might have been English too. But when, at the second "Pardon," she turned, there was an unmistakable foreign grace in her slight acknowledgment. She and her companion, an older lady, exchanged a word or two, but it was French, spoken with the purest of accents. So, if Roderick had had any hope of finding a country-woman, it faded out at once.

Faded—as the lovely vision of the Jungfrau and Fensterhorn already had begun to fade. Yet still the little group stood silently gazing, in a common sympathy. Roderick never looked even at his young neighbour, until, suddenly turning, their eyes met. Both were full of tears:

"At the first sight
They have changed eyes."

People dispute this truth, and yet it is a truth—to some people, and under some circumstances.

Startled to a degree that almost annoyed him—bowing instinctively, and then blushing deeply to think that he had done so, that he had taken such a liberty with any stranger lady, Roderick hurried away, having indeed waited so long that his swift young feet, and the happy tardiness of Swiss railways, alone saved him from losing his train, and the Reynier soirée.

"But I will come back to Berne to-morrow," thought he. "It is a far prettier town than Neuchâtel; and—I wonder if she is a Bernoise? I wonder if I shall ever see her face again?"

Just then—was it possible?—in the dim light a grey gown passed him, and slipped into a third-class carriage. And he had an impression that *she* wore a grey gown.

“Nonsense!” laughing at himself as he lounged back in his luxurious “wagon;” “a creature like that couldn’t possibly travel third-class.”

So he tried to forget her, and think only of the Jungfrau; then, secondarily, of the means he must take to interest M. Reynier in his search for Archibald Jardine—in whom, it must be confessed, his own interest was fast dying out. Anything tedious, or dull, or unpleasant, was so new to him. He did not appreciate it at all.

The train being late, he had only just time to dart out, and fly to his hotel, to dress for the evening.

He was not a fop—this foolish young Roderick—but he was just a trifle of a dandy; that is, he liked to dress well, and was particular about minute points of costume. And when dressed he was a goodly young fellow to look at. Even the garçon, who smiled secretly at his ordering a *voiture* for a *course* of a street’s length to M. Reynier’s, gave an approving glance to “*ce monsieur Anglais*.”

It is so much the fashion to make one’s hero grumpy, middle-aged, boorish, plain—always snubbing the heroine, and all the more adored by her—that I quite hesitate to confess how, when Roderick descended from his most unnecessary equipage, in complete evening dress, with diamond studs and daintily-tinted gloves, he was the very opposite of this rather unpleasant personage. He had a fine face and a graceful figure; a bearing that was “every inch the gentleman”—and manners—well, he could not have said a harsh or discourteous word to a woman—any woman, high or low, ugly or pretty, young or old—for his life! Thus he appeared as he entered the salon of M. le Professeur Reynier.

It was very dimly lighted; with shaded lamps, so that, at first, Roderick distinguished nothing; then he became aware of a grey-haired gentleman, a matronly lady, and a cloud of young people of different ages, down to quite small children; of a courteous and kindly reception, and of passing into a *salle à manger*, where was laid out a simple but abundant meal, corresponding to the "hungry tea" of Scotch habit. Everything, indeed, was extremely simple—but so pretty! from the shiny parquet floor to the tastefully decorated table, with its dainty china, flowers, and fruit. One missed a little the bright English fire; and the stove gave a certain closeness to the room—a sense of warm darkness, which, however, was not unpleasant; there was a sort of mystery about it, and youth likes mystery. Roderick glanced round him at the party, evidently quite a family party. There was no occasion whatever for the diamond studs and light gloves, which he ardently wished he had never put on! But, true to his Celtic nature, he began to accommodate himself to circumstances.

He had wont to be conceited over his aptitude for foreign tongues, but when, after a brief pause, in deference to the English guest, conversation rolled back like a tide, he felt himself completely drowned in the flood of French—bright, lively, impulsive, energetic, as only French talk can be—darting to and fro, scintillating around and across the table; at which he sat like—like a stone, or an ass, he said to himself—unable to make out a single word!

By-and-by, however, things cleared a little. That sweet courtesy to the stranger which one always finds abroad, began to make the Babel intelligible; his host soon led him into conversation, and, seeing that no one present attempted a word of English, he tried to get over his own shyness, and do his best in French. Besides, he soon found the great antidote to shyness—self-forgetfulness. He became interested at once in

this happy, merry family circle—elder sons and their wives, growing-up daughters, down to little boys and girls. Evidently the old Professeur had his quiver full.

How he had managed to bring them up in this remote corner of the world, as it seemed to Roderick, and in comparative poverty, for the house was not even a house—Mrs. Jardine would have called it “a flat”—and the one servant who waited was quite a common peasant girl; how he had imparted to them all that intelligence and refinement, *bien instruits* as well as *bien élevés*, for they seemed to be as familiar with English literature as with their own, passed the young man’s comprehension—the rich young man who had believed that money alone could do this.

It was an odd thing, a very odd thing: but, dropping down as if from the clouds, upon this little town which a week ago was to him a mere dot on the map, he felt himself quite at home there—he a Cambridge man, and a man of fortune—more at home than he had done in Richerden society all his days. And when, re-entering the *salon*, he found there a few other guests, scarcely visible in the dim light, and was introduced expressly to a “Mees Somebody from Edimbourg,” who responded, with painful blushes, in the broadest of Scotch accents, he heartily wished his own country people were—well, that they were all safe at home!

“And here, monsieur,” continued his host, leading him up to another lady, middle-aged—“here is one of our best friends, though but newly settled near us, who I doubt not will have the pleasure of conversing with you in your own tongue—Monsieur Ardon—Madame ——”

Roderick was so amused by the transformation of his own name that he scarcely caught the lady’s, but he was too shy still either to correct the one or inquire about the other.

"M. Reynier is very polite," said his neighbour, still speaking in French. "But he forgets that it is my daughter who knows English so well; her papa took the greatest pains to teach her. For me—I was always too busy, and too stupid. Besides," with a slight sigh, which directed Roderick's attention from the gentle face to the widow's mourning—though not exactly "weeds"—"my husband loved French best. It was the language of his adopted country."

"He was not Swiss-born then?" asked Roderick, sitting down by her. She was neither beautiful, nor even pretty, never could have been; but there was a great charm in her manner—a mixture of French grace and Swiss earnestness—which attracted him much.

"No, monsieur; he was English, or rather Scotch, naturalized here. My daughter!"—but no translation can express the tender intonation of that word *ma fille*—"will you come and tell this gentleman the name of the place—I cannot pronounce it—where your dear papa was born?"

Roderick's gaze followed madame's to a tall slender girl, dressed, not like her mother in black, but in pure white; no floppy, flouncy muslin, but a thick soft woollen material, up to the throat and down to the wrists. She had a small, well-set, curly head—actual curls, like a child's—and turning quietly round, she met him with those calm blue eyes, the very same eyes which had filled with tears at the sunset beauty of the Jungfrau!

Once more the young man started, absolutely started. He seemed taken—nay, clutched, by the very hand of destiny itself. For on entering the room he had looked into every fresh face of these pleasant Swiss girls, vaguely hoping to find again those wonderful blue eyes. They faced him now in entire unconsciousness, and with a direct child-like simplicity, corresponding with the childish curls.

“Mamma,” she said, bowing to the stranger, a grave, dignified, self-possessed bow, more like that of a frank Englishwoman than these timid foreign maidens, “pardon. I am just going to sing with Sophie Reynier; but I will come back presently, as M. Reynier desired me, and speak English with this gentleman, if he wishes it.”

He did not wish it at all; he would infinitely have preferred French. He thought that language, as she spoke it, in tones lower and softer than he had ever heard before, sounded like the tongue of the angels.

And when, in the duet, after Mademoiselle Reynier had sung a few bars, there broke in, like a lark in the dusk of the morning, a clear, fresh soprano, the very voice he had heard behind him in church, Roderick felt himself literally trembling. He was impressionable, it was true—almost as much so as a woman; there was a deal of the woman in him for all his manliness—rather, I should say, *with* all his manliness, since the best woman has always somewhat of a man’s strength, the noblest man a woman’s gentleness; but no impressionability could account for the delight—nay, the ecstasy, with which he listened to the song.

It was not much of a song—the girl’s voice made it all; but when it ceased he awoke, as out of a dream, and looked round as for something he had been in search of all his life long.

She came forward from among the group of girls—sweet, graceful girls they were, but none like her. She seemed distinct from any girl he had ever seen. The very style of her dress, so different from what he had left behind in Richerden drawing-rooms, caught his fancy. Instead of the fashionable eccentricities of dress which he hated so in his sisters, were these simple, girlish curls—natural curls—clustering tightly round her head; and these long, soft lines of drapery, like Flaxman’s women. In truth, she might have stood just as she was for a Penelope, an Andromache.

"Mamma," she said, still in French, and creeping, French-girl fashion, close to her mother's side, "I shall be very happy to speak English to monsieur, whom I think I have seen before—on the Terrasse at Berne to-day. It is he, mamma, who, as I told you, did us the honour to be so charmed with our beautiful mountains."

Then she, too, had observed him. But she had come home and told the incident at once to her mother. He, now, could not have told it to any mortal soul.

"It is mademoiselle who honours me by even a passing remembrance," answered Roderick, striving hard to infuse into his blunt speech—how rude and blunt it seemed!—even a tithe of her gracious courtesy.

"May I claim you as a country-woman? Your father was English?"

"No, Scotch. There is a difference, is there not? though I fail to make mamma understand it. Papa was a Highlander."

She said this in English, speaking slowly, but with great purity and correctness, pronouncing all her "h's" and "th's."

"Mademoiselle has a perfect accent; she must, of course, have visited our country?" said Roderick, eagerly.

"No; I have never left my mountains. I am entirely Swiss; only papa used sometimes to talk to me of Scotland, and tell me I looked almost like a Scotch lassie. Do I?"

"Heaven forbid!" the renegade was near exclaiming, but contented himself by explaining, in a very eccentric and confused manner, that she had certainly the fair hair and blue eyes of the North.

"So had papa; but he was little, and I am tall—very tall for a Swiss girl. That was why he thought I resembled the girls of his country, especially a cousin he had whom he loved—liked—is not that the right English word?—very much. But here I am going on

talking of ourselves and our affairs, which is very unpolite, you know. But we are always so glad to meet any English person, mamma and I. I must go and tell her—she will be so pleased that you think me a little—just a very little—like my papa’s country-women.”

He would have told her that the thing she was most like was an angel, but of course such a point-blank truth was quite impossible, and, besides, she had already flown away on her invisible wings, and hid herself among the crowd of ordinary girls. There was nothing for him, poor man! but to go and make love, or rather politeness, to her mother, with all the skill and the best French of which he was capable.

“Mademoiselle has a most beautiful voice, and sings charmingly,” said he at last.

“Ah! monsieur is too kind. But indeed it is true. And she does everything charmingly, if a mother may be pardoned for saying so. But she is the last of seven, and her father is dead. We are alone together, she and I.” Then, suddenly changing into brightness, “Perhaps monsieur is one of a numerous family?”

“No, I have only three sisters, and my father, too, is dead—my dear father!”

“Ah!” with a quick intuition; and, after a glance at his face, a kindly hand was laid on the young man’s arm. “But monsieur has his mother still living? and a happy woman in possessing him is Madame——; pardon, but I did not catch the name.”

“Jardine—Roderick Jardine.”

The Swiss lady drew back with a surprise that he could not have failed to observe, had he not been wholly preoccupied in the difficult task of trying at once to be polite to her and to see and hear all that was passing at the far end of the room.

“Madame, I perceive your daughter is going to sing again, and I am so fond of music. May I go and listen?”

He was off as if there were wires to his feet. Poor

fellow ! it was a very bad case, but not the first, nor probably the last, that has happened in this world.

However, he maintained his composure very creditably, talked courteously to all the Demoiselles Reynier at once, turned over their pages, examined their music, French, Italian, and German, and at last, lighting upon an English song, asked if any of them sang it.

The girls all shook their merry heads, pointing to the one whom he had not addressed, scarcely even glanced at, though he knew exactly how she looked, sitting there at the piano with her blue eyes cast down, and a faint colour, like a China rose, on her soft cheek.

"*She sings it ; ask her.*"

"Will mademoiselle do me that honour?" said Roderick, quite humbly, feeling more timid than he had ever felt in his life.

"It is written for a tenor voice, monsieur. It is not a young lady's song."

"Yet I have often heard young ladies sing it, and very badly, too,"—remembering how he had hated it at Richerden dinner-parties.

"Perhaps, I also——" with an amused look, which he answered by another.

"No, no ! Mademoiselle is too honest to finish her sentence. She knows she could not sing very badly."

"I will try my best."

It was a simple little song : most people have heard it "done to death" in many a drawing-room—"My Queen." This girl sang it in her pretty foreign English—not broken English, but, of course, with a slight accent, which rather increased the charm—sang it, not impetuously, but with a tender reserve, her China roses slowly growing into crimson ones as she did it, till at last she seemed to forget herself in the song—

"When and how shall I earliest meet her ?

What are the words that she first will say ?

By what name shall I learn to greet her ?

I know not now : it will come some day.

With this selfsame sunlight shining upon her,
Shining down on her ringlets' sheen—
She is standing somewhere; she I will honour—
She that I wait for—my Queen, my Queen!

* * * * *

“I will not dream of her tall and stately :
She that I love may be airy and light.
I will not say she must speak sedately :
Whatever she does, it will sure be right.
She may be humble or proud, my lady,
Or that sweet calm which is just between ;
But, whenever she comes, she will find me ready
To do her homage—my Queen, my Queen !

“But she must be courteous, she must be holy,
Pure, sweet, and tender, the girl I love.
Whether her birth be humble or lowly
I care no more than the angels above.
And I'll give my heart to my lady's keeping,
And ever her strength on my own shall lean ;
And the stars shall fall and the saints be weeping,
Ere I cease to love her—my Queen, my Queen !”

“Thanks,” said Roderick, in English.

It was a mere word, scarcely audible, the briefest and most common-place acknowledgment, yet it seemed to imply the gratitude, the benediction of a lifetime, given from the man to the woman whom he at once recognizes as *the* woman sent by Heaven (if he has eyes to see, and strength to accept and hold her) to be to him his “help-meet,” his joy, his crown, and his salvation.

The feeling was so sudden, so solemn, so overpowering, that he never attempted to fight against it. Without another word he withdrew from the group—from her even; indeed, it seemed easier to watch her from a distance than to speak to her—and waited till the mother and daughter should retire, when he was determined to find out from M. Reynier all about them. At this moment—it was almost ridiculous—he actually did not know their names !

Another half-hour—spent Roderick scarcely knew

how, except that he was talking to half-a-dozen people, and watching one other person all the while—and he saw them retire; passing him with the usual distant bow. He had half extended his hand, English fashion, but happily drew it back in time.

“Au revoir, monsieur,” responded the mother, with a courteous smile; but the daughter merely bent her head without a word.

“A charming pair,” observed Madame Reynier, after they were gone. “My husband thought you would like to meet them. Mademoiselle speaks English so well.”

“Perfectly.”

“And yet she has never quitted Switzerland. Her father lived in the very heart of the Alps; a most learned and amiable man, but eccentric—decidedly eccentric. He left them poor. She is obliged to teach—to give music lessons—this dear Mademoiselle Silence.”

“What did you say? What is her name?” cried Roderick, feeling all the blood rushing to his heart—to his face.

“It is an English name. I will call my daughter to pronounce it English fashion.”

And, with an amazement that even amounted to awe, Roderick discovered that this girl—the first girl in all his life who had won from him a second thought—was his cousin; very distant, but still a cousin, and another Silence Jardine.

In his Quixotic search he had done nothing—had almost forgotten what he meant to do; yet here was all done for him. With a feeling as of a man pursued by fate—blind, irresistible, and yet most blessed fate—he, without asking a single question more, got away as soon as he could. Once outside that friendly door, and away from everybody’s sight, he rushed, almost staggering as he went, down to the waterside, and spent an hour there, walking wildly to and fro in the moon-

light—the wonderful, sweet moonlight, bright as day—which poured itself in a silver glory over the smooth lake and the sleeping town.

CHAPTER V.

LIKING—OR LOVE ?

“Who ever wooed
As in his boyish hope he would have done ?”

AND what man ever found the woman among women, in whom he fondly sees “his bride to be, his ever new delight,” exactly when and where he had expected to find her ?

This girl, Silence Jardine—Roderick smiled over the Gallicized version of the old family name ; and yet how pretty it sounded—that she was meant for him ; that she would one day be his wife, if by any human power, or patience, such a joy were possible, he never once doubted. All his life he had been accustomed to get every good thing he wanted. Why not this ?

Besides, he felt so strong ; so capable of winning anything, everything. That one hour of passionate pacing up and down under the stars seemed to have made a man of him ; like the solitary vigil which the young esquires of old were left to spend, previous to being dubbed knights. When he awoke, quite early, long before daybreak, he was no longer a dreamy boy, but a belted knight ready to go out and fight, with his lady’s token on his helm and his lady’s love in his heart. And yet, only twenty hours ago, his life had been so aimless that at breakfast he had actually tossed up a half-penny to decide whether or not he should go direct home to Richerden !

Now what was to be done ?

Not, certainly, what impulse prompted, to find out Madame Jardine's address (would that he had known it last night, and could have watched, Romeo-like, under the window of his sweet, unconscious Juliet !), and, entering the house like a whirlwind, fling himself at the dear lady's feet, proclaiming himself her unknown cousin, imploring her to take all Miss Jardine's money—and his too—if only she would give him her priceless treasure, her daughter Silence !

That she was a priceless treasure, this gentle Swiss girl, he never doubted, though it was only twenty-four hours—no, less, sixteen—since he had first seen her face. But the Reyniers loved her ; and the Reyniers were most estimable people, and must know. In fact, having already made up his mind, it was easy to argue from foregone conclusions. And besides, the whole affair looked so like fatality—the fatality which secretly follows us all our lives, only some of us see it, and some do not.

When the lazy sun began to rise, and show his glorious face over the peaks of the Jungfrau, precisely as yesterday—ah, what strange things had happened since yesterday ! so that in his life it was no longer dawn, but full day—Roderick felt as if he had come hither not of his own will, but under the guidance of dear dead hands, his father's and another's ; helpless once, but so strong and helpful now. Knowing what he did know, and guessing what never could be known in this world, he yet felt sure that, if there was one person more than another whom his father would have preferred him to marry, it would be a Silence Jardine.

But he must be very cautious. That they were poor, the Reyniers had told him, though the fact had scarcely entered his mind—he knew so little about poverty, and cared so little about riches. They might be proud ; if so, perhaps it would be as well not to let them know he was wealthy. Some vague idea struck

him of acting the Lord of Burleigh over again ; but Silence had no need to grow “ a noble lady,”—she was that already. Not a girl in Richerden was fit to tie her shoes. Even his mother and sisters——

But there was a certain loyalty in the young man, which made him revolt from judging these as he judged other Richerden folk. They were his own—he loved them.

She, the new-found, all perfect, “ inexpressive she !”

“ The stars shall fall and the saints be weeping,
Ere I cease to love her—my queen, my queen !”

He kept humming the song to himself in a passionate undertone all the way to M. Reynier’s, whither he had determined to go and explain what Mr. Black, in the feeble French of his letter of introduction, had left wholly unexplained, the why and wherefore of young Mr. Jardine’s visit to Switzerland.

How he got through that explanation as he sat face to face with the kind old professor, in dressing-gown and slippers, Roderick never could tell. Nor what M. Reynier thought of it, though he veiled his opinion in most sympathetic politeness, and gave at once the address which the young man asked, or believed he had asked, in the most business-like and indifferent manner possible.

“ Certainly, certainly, yes ; and my wife and daughters shall call at once to congratulate the dear ladies on their good fortune in being discovered by so excellent a relative. Stay, perhaps monsieur would like Madame Reynier to go in advance and break to them the good tidings ? It might startle them, and Madame Jardine is in very delicate health, and they are very poor, monsieur knows ?”

Yes, he knew it ; but he did not take it in—no more than the young queen who, hearing her subjects lacked bread, suggested their eating cake.

“ I think, Monsieur Reynier,” he said, with modest

hesitation, "I should like to tell them myself. It is a family matter, and they would not feel my visit a liberty. They are my cousins, you see. If"—with a sudden idea that almost made him smile—"if you would kindly vouch for me that I am—well, respectable, in short."

"Even if monsieur did not carry his letter of recommendation in his face, Mr. Black's guarantee would have been quite sufficient," answered the professor, with grave politeness.

Another time, Roderick would have laughed to think what his mother would have thought of her son's owing his sole credentials of character to Mr. Black the factor! but now he was in too great haste to linger an instant more than courtesy demanded; and it seemed hours, rather than minutes, before, armed with M. Reynier's *petit billet*, he found himself mounting the long stair (so like a Scotch one, only clean, scrupulously clean), *étage* after *étage*. Madame Jardine lived *au quatrième*, almost up to the roof of the tall house.

"Are they so very poor?" he thought, with a sharp pang, followed by a wild delight. To come as the *Deus ex machinâ*—the good genius—the protecting angel—how delicious! Ay, even though it were actual want he was about to find.

But no such discovery presented itself to the eyes of the young man, delicate in his tastes, quick, morbidly quick, to detect and revolt from anything coarse or squalid. A little Swiss damsel, in *sabots*, opened the door of the *appartement* and showed him into a salon—very foreign certainly; his mother would have been shocked at the almost carpetless floor and curtainless windows; but exquisitely neat, harmonious in colour, refined in arrangement. The glaring grandeur, the heavy splendour, of those familiar Richerden drawing-rooms, were altogether absent; but there was a soft subdued light, a faint odour of flowers, some aromatic

late autumn flowers, which lapped his senses in a strange bewildering pleasure. He sat down, wondering if he were dreaming, and whether he should not shortly wake and find himself back in Richerden, looking out into the muggy streets, the dreary park, glad to escape from himself, and from that luxurious habitation which was called "home."

And when she entered—not madame, but mademoiselle—he felt more than ever as if the whole thing were a vision of the night. She entered with a soft, silent grace, which made her Puritanic name seem the most appropriate possible, and, standing still in the door-way, bowed to him in the distant foreign way. But she spoke in English—her sweet, slow, precise English, very correct in accent, though the sentences were sometimes arranged French fashion, and the "monsieur," translated into "sir," frequently appeared therein, in a funny un-English way.

"Mamma has sent me, sir, to present her regrets that she cannot see you." (He had announced himself merely as a friend of M. Reynier's.) "But she is a little more suffering than usual to-day, and she has not risen. Will you say to me that which you desired to say to her?"

"I know—I feel—it is I who ought to apologize," stammered Roderick, feeling it absolutely impossible to face those great, blue, innocent, ignorant eyes. "But I came on business—business which could not be delayed."

The young girl visibly shrank. "Oh, I hope—I hope it is no more sorrow; mamma has suffered so much."

"Indeed, no; quite the contrary, I trust. May I be permitted to explain?"

But he could not explain. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. All his self-possession, his good common-sense, even his good manners, seemed to have fled from him. He felt like a boor, an actual

boor, in the presence of this young creature, whom he had so suddenly elected, or believed Fate had elected for him, as the angel of his life, the mistress of his heart, the queen and ruler of his destiny. So foolish, so romantic are some men, even in this matter-of-fact nineteenth century! O women—queens that might be—think, are you all found worthy to wear your crown?

“I am afraid—I—— Pardon, but if mademoiselle would condescend to take these to madame her mother,” said he, hurriedly, falling back into French, as if its formal phrases of politeness made a barrier against himself and his irrepressible agitation.

She received the letter and card without looking at him or at them; he felt a slight pang in noticing that, though evidently recognizing him, she showed not the slightest curiosity even to learn his name—and vanished from the salon.

“Vanished” was the most appropriate word for her. Some women—Roderick had known several at home—enter a room with a bounce and quit it with a bang; this girl stole into it like sunshine or any other blessed, silent thing, and departing, left darkness behind her. Or so the young man thought, the hapless or happy fellow to whom had come the first sunburst of that mysterious instinct called Love.

An instinct which, though not excluding reason, sometimes transcends it in a very remarkable way. For, had you asked, he could hardly have told you why this face had so charmed him. Now that he saw it in full daylight, he recognized that it was not really beautiful: in truth, he had often seen much handsomer women. Nay, by the odd contrast which Nature often amuses herself with, had he looked into the mirror opposite he would have seen features far more artistically “correct;” a finer figure and altogether a much more *distingué* specimen of humanity. But he did not look: he never thought about himself at all, only of

her. He felt as if he never should think, except of her, to the end of his days.

Could his mother, who believed no woman alive too good for her boy—perhaps not good enough—could Mrs. Jardine have seen him sitting humbly there in a paltry Swiss parlour, all the contents of which might be valued at a few pounds, watching, counting each minute till the door should open to admit—what? a poor little Swiss girl, a mere music-teacher, neither grand nor stylish, whose dress—nay, whose whole wardrobe—could scarcely have cost the sum that the Richerden damsels were in the habit of paying for a pocket-handkerchief or a muff! Nay, who was not even a pretty girl, except for her eyes; since the wonderful expression which spiritualized her whole face into beauty, and which in the most perfect degree had been caught by Roderick when he first saw her gazing at the Jungfrau, was not likely to be detected by the lady who might one day be—oh, startling thought, had either known it!—her mother-in-law.

The link between them, the young man who already contemplated welding together such a union of opposites, sat for fully half an hour, forlorn as a sparrow on a house-top, and very near the house-top too, before any sign reached him that *his* possible mother-in-law—the sweet Swiss lady whom he felt he loved already, she was so like her daughter in some things—had recognized his existence or his eagerly claimed cousinship. At last the door opened.

Roderick sprang forward, then drew back painfully embarrassed. But Silence advanced with that gentle composure which nothing ever seemed to disturb, and with only the faintest added colour in her cheek, as, English fashion, she extended her little, soft, thoroughly English-looking hand.

“Monsieur my cousin, mamma bids me welcome you to our country, and to say that she will receive you at six this evening, if you will do her the honour to come.”

“Mademoiselle ma cousine, the honour is entirely on my side. I shall be only too delighted.”

And then he paused, half expecting she would say something more, or at least ask him to be seated; but she did not. Evidently it was not the custom of Swiss young ladies to hold morning interviews with young gentlemen in the absence of their mothers.

He, accustomed to have young ladies more than civil to him, absolutely “running after” him, so far as he would let them do it; lively young ladies who danced and joked, flirted and talked slang, meaning no harm certainly, but persisting in making themselves “jolly companions every one” to the opposite sex, he was struck into more than admiration, reverence, for this gentle, reticent, womanly woman, who held herself aloof from all men, except in mere courtesy, until there should come the man to whom she could unlock her inmost soul. He fancied her sailing along, moon-like, in her calm, blue sky of maidenly life till—till she reached Latmos. And then, oh! the dream of the stretched-out longing arms, of the passion of meeting hearts, each as pure as the other, in a love old as the heavens and young as the ever-renewed earth.

He started—and truly he had need to start, this self-made Endymion, this very foolish shepherd—and remembered that he was a modern English gentleman paying a morning call, and that he must immediately take up his hat and go.

The more so as in spite of herself his young “cousin”—how he clung to the word and the tie—was, he could perceive, a good deal agitated. Her colour changed, her little fingers fluttered over her dress; yes, it was a grey dress, of the sort called Carmelite, for he recollected once admiring the same on some lady visitor, and his sister Bella had laughed at him, saying it only cost a shilling a yard, and was just “fit for table-maids.” But upon *her*, with its soft folds and tender, dove-like tint, he could have knelt down and kissed its very hem!

“Mademoiselle—Miss Jardine.”

She lifted up her eyes, smiling. “Yes, I am that by right, and I like to be called so. ‘Miss’ reminds me that I belong a little to my father’s country.”

“Then you are satisfied—your mother too is quite satisfied, that I am really your cousin?” cried Roderick, eagerly.

“Not my cousin-german of course,” she answered, again drawing back a little, “but my cousin much removed—how do you say it in English?—*très-éloigné*. That is, they had the same great-grand-parents—these three who were educated together, Mr. Henry Jardine, who was the father of monsieur, my own father, and the lady I was named after, Cousin Silence.”

“Then you too have heard of Cousin Silence?” cried Roderick, feeling every minute the mysterious chains more tightly drawn round him.

“Certainly ; my father loved her very much once—always, I think—though it was years since he had written to her. Did you know her? Is she living yet?”

M. Reynier’s note, evidently, then, had explained nothing of the money affairs. Roderick felt glad. His welcome here was simply as “Monsieur mon cousin,” nothing more.

“Cousin Silence is not living, but it is scarcely two months since she died.”

“Ah, then I shall never see her, and I should have liked it so ! Sometimes papa promised when I was older to take me to see his land, and Blackhall, and Miss Silence Jardine. Did you ever see her, sir?”

“Once—only once ; the day my father died. A sad story. I will tell you about it another time.”

By a sudden instinct she seemed to catch his change of look, of tone. “Monsieur is very good,” she said, gently, and questioned no more.

There was indeed no more to say, no possible excuse for him to remain ; yet he lingered. Shy as a

school-boy, he felt as if he could not get out of the room.

"This evening at six, then," said Mademoiselle Jardine, with gentle dismissal, not again offering her hand, but merely bowing, as Roderick walked—he felt very much as if he were crawling—out of the salon.

And yet it was a glorious humility, a noble shame, a sensation more delicious than anything he had believed the world could offer. The world, so empty to him of sympathy, of love, that is, the up-looking love, since his dear father died. He almost felt as if his father knew it all; the reflex of what perhaps he too had known in his youth, the "love's young dream," which never comes twice. Happy those to whom it comes truly as love, and neither as passion nor as folly; who can say to themselves, as Roderick did during the weary hours between twelve and six, "Now what shall I do for *her*? What would she like me to do? Something, I am sure, that would be good and right."

And with this purpose, and perhaps another behind it, he sat down and did, what he had forgotten to do, day after day, ever since he reached Neuchâtel,—he wrote a long letter home to his mother. A very affectionate, amusing, clever letter, just what he knew would please her, and which, as he also knew, she would show to every near and dear friend she had. Consequently, it was not exactly confidential; indeed, Roderick was not in the habit of writing confidential letters to anybody; but it was quite honest so far as it went; gave a glowing description of the Alps at Berne, and an amusing one of the soirée at Professor Reynier's; painted graphically the quaint little town of Neuchâtel, where he said he intended to stay a few days longer, and ended by stating briefly how he had found, among M. Reynier's guests, the objects of his search; at least, all that were left to find. Archibald Jardine's widow and only surviving child. Whether the "child" was old or young, boy or girl, he omitted to particularize

—a degree of reserve which surpassed even the ordinary reticence of Mr. Roderick Jardine.

Poor mother! she was rather to be pitied, if she had known all. And yet, seeing it is from the first the parents who make the children, and not the children the parents, perhaps mothers who need pity for not receiving the full confidence of their sons, have in some way or other earned what they get. Alas! it is both a sad and awe-striking thought that many a poor “black sheep” may have been dyed that ominous colour by the a thors of his being, both after his birth and before it.

Poor dear woman!—paying sedulously her vapid, useless morning calls, doing her endless shopping, dining out, or arranging dinner-parties at home, occupations which filled up the sum total of Mrs. Jardine’s existence, and which she expected her family to conform to, as the old generation so constantly expects the new to grow up exactly after its own pattern—little she guessed that this untoward new generation had already taken its lot into its own hands. Little she knew, on receiving her welcome letter, that the instant her son finished it, he plunged into a world of dreamy delight, in which she had no part, wherein almost her existence was temporarily forgotten. Yet so it was; so it must inevitably be. Happy those parents who are wise enough to accept the inevitable—accept and forgive. Happier still those who are able even to sympathize:—“I also have been in Arcadia.”

How far the muggy atmosphere and swimming streets of Neuchâtel now resembled Arcadia, is doubtful; yet, when Roderick went out to post his letter, he seemed to walk on air. Every corner of the quaint old town looked picturesque; every passer-by interesting. For he had a vague hope—half fear too—that under some umbrella he might find the grey gown, black felt hat, and blue eyes.

Just on the faintest chance of this, he went round by the shore of the lake, where a sudden wild wind had caused the waves to rise and roll in, almost like a sea tide, greatly to the distress of the poor Neuchâtel-lerois. Various movables had been carried away, and a large market barrow was now tossing up and down upon actual breakers—while its luckless owner stood wringing her hands, and two or three men were wading in, vainly trying to catch it with ropes.

Roderick went to help them; he never could forbear rushing to the rescue, in any case where his youthful strength was available. Presently he succeeded in saving the cart, and in wetting himself to the skin; which he hardly felt, for, in wading ashore, the first sight he saw, fixed upon him, was those two earnest blue eyes!

She stood among the little crowd, her umbrella in one hand, a roll of music in the other; behind her the little whitecapped *bonne* stood full of sympathy—as indeed everybody was—first, with the owner of the cart, and then with its salvors. She recognized him at once.

“Oh, how good is monsieur!” she exclaimed warmly in French. “See, madame,” turning to the poor market-woman—“your cart is safe, absolutely uninjured. How kind, how brave it was of these men, and of this English monsieur!”

And then monsieur, half deafened by the storm of thanks and applause from these warm Swiss hearts, was glad to beat a retreat, and find himself, he knew not how, walking along by the side of Mademoiselle Jardine, and talking, still in French, about how it all happened.

“I have never seen the lake rise so,” she said. “All the town has been down here, watching the waves, which are higher, they say, than they have been seen for twenty years—ever since the year I was born.”

She was twenty then; he had thought her younger.

“Mamma happened to be at Neuchâtel, and remembers it well—that day—she had me in her arms, a little baby, and, if papa had not held her fast, the waves and the wind would have swept us away, both of us. How strange it seems!”

“Very strange; but life is very strange!” said the young man, as he drank in, full of dreamy delight, the soft tones, the sudden sweet up-lifting of those lovely eyes. They rested on his soaked clothes.

“Monsieur ought to go at once to his hotel!” she said, with a pretty decision. “Pardon; but I am so accustomed to look after people—to take care of them. I always have to take care of mamma, you know. She has been an invalid so long, with her chest. I think it is that which has given me a morbid terror of damp and wet.”

“Yet you are out in all this rain, *ma cousine*?” intentionally changing the word from “*mademoiselle*,” and seeing with delight that, though she took no notice, she half smiled, as if not displeased.

“Oh, I? That is quite a different thing. I am strong; nothing ever harms me. Besides, it is unavoidable. I give lessons; I must go out, you know.”

That gentle, firm “*il faut*,” to one who had never known an unpleasant “must” in his life—how it went to the young man’s heart!

“Is it very hard work, this teaching?” said he, trying to hide the inexpressible tenderness that was already trembling in his voice.

“Oh no, not at all hard; quite pleasant, sometimes!” she replied, cheerfully. “But monsieur must really go to his hotel at once. *Au revoir*, till six!”

And with a brief, sweet remorselessness, she bowed and passed on, picking her way through the water-channels and the mud, and never once looking behind. If she had!

But no. Roderick felt certain she had no more idea of what he was feeling than the moon has of those who

stand and gaze at her, so entirely serene and composed was her bearing, so free from the slightest self-consciousness, or consciousness of him either, such as he had seen in some girls, who changed their manner on the instant any man addressed them. Now this young Swiss girl seemed sufficient to herself, and independent of every man alive.

It was not flattering exactly, in the mean way by which some young men like to be flattered; yet, as Roderick turned into his hotel, mechanically obeying her, and taking pleasure in doing so, he felt more and more that she was the one woman in the world whom he could love—nay, worship—whether she ever thought of him or not; and owning this he sighed. Already he had ceased to be satisfied with the “moon-struck madness” of abstract admiration, already had come the desire of possession, of having the beloved treasure all to himself, of hiding it close in his bosom, “lest his jewel he should tine.” Fast as his love had grown, like Jack’s bean-stalk, all in a night, it had already reached this height.

Another point it had reached also. To think of her—her whom he would have shielded from every harsh blast, and made life to her an actual bed of roses—walking through the soaking streets, giving horrible music-lessons! It was to him positive agony. Was she so poor? And he, laden with that heap of useless riches!

This evening, with an involuntary and quite inexplicable feeling, he did not seek for his diamond studs or any other resplendency of his always careful toilette, but dressed himself as simply as possible. He felt as if he could have gone in sackcloth and ashes, if by any means it could have advantaged her.

Again he climbed, but impetuously, joyously, as if it were the high-road to heaven, the long stair which led to Madame Jardine’s door, and found that what he had hoped would be a party *à trois* was added to by the

pleasant faces of M. Reynier and his daughters, and one or two other guests—not pleasant, however, to his eyes at all. Nevertheless, he made the best of it. Most young men would have delightfully acted *cavalier seul* to such a charming cluster of girls; but Roderick would a thousand times rather have sat beside this one girl and watched her pour out the tea and distribute the various condiments which seemed to compose this innocent evening meal, after the custom of the Neuchâtel folk.

How charming it was, and how charming they were! Had he had his full perceptions in use, and even with the proportion he had available, allowing for the unfortunate peculiarity of having always to listen for what *she* was saying, and watch what *she* was doing, the young man could not have failed to discover the extreme intelligence, mingled with extreme simplicity, of this little society, where all were poor (or what his mother would have thought poor), but all refined and cultivated. Never, even in his Cambridge life, had he heard better “conversation” (that rare, delightful art or science—which is it?—which only well-bred and well-educated people can attain to) than he now heard round this simple board, in a far-away Swiss town, and in a widow’s household too, where, so far as he could see, there was not a trace of wealth or luxury.

All the talk was in French, of course, but now and then “Miss” Jardine addressed him in English, to which he eagerly responded, as to a sweet secret felicity in which the rest did not share. And how he thanked the benign fate which dragged away the masculine element in the party to some lecture—half Neuchâtel seemed composed of *professeurs* or *écoliers*—and compelled an early breaking-up.

“But Monsieur Jardine, who is not at college, need not depart,” said madame, courteously. “Will he not stay and tell us a little of his beautiful Scotland, which my husband loved so, and sometimes thought to see

once more, but he died without seeing it? Come and sit by me, *chérie*, and listen. She loves her father's land almost as if she had seen it, does my daughter Silence."

Afterwards, how like a dream seemed that first evening, that first talk, almost a family talk, in the dim light of the shaded lamp, with the wind howling outside round the roof of the lofty house, and inside peace, all peace. What a picture it made! the invalid mother half sitting, half lying on her sofa, and her daughter on a stool at her feet. Desdemona-like, listening, all eyes and ears, as this new Othello told them, not of his wars, labours, and sufferings, for he had none to tell, but of Scotland and of Blackhall, the little that he knew—how he wished it had been more! Lastly, of the only time he had seen Cousin Silence, when she came to his father's death-bed; and of that beloved father, whom he scarcely ever mentioned to strangers. But with these it was a feeling altogether different.

Mother and daughter, so sweet, so united, so simple, so good. "How I wish," he exclaimed once, "that my father had known you, or that you had known my father!"

And then Madame Jardine questioned him rather closely about himself and his college life, watching him with great intentness, and with a gentle shrewdness which showed that amidst all her simplicity she was a far-seeing woman, not altogether ignorant of the world and its ways. Finally she drew from him the story of his journey hither and its object.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment of both mother and daughter when they learned that they had "inherited"—Roderick carefully put it in that light, trusting to his good luck to be able to explain it away afterwards—inherited a sum of money from Miss Silence Jardine.

"How good of her! how generous!" cried Madame

Jardine, clasping her hands with one of those impulsive gestures which we English think so strange, but which in her seemed perfectly natural. But they had not descended to her daughter, who, in mien and manner, was not at all what we term "foreign," but as quiet as any English girl. "I should explain to you, monsieur," continued Madame Jardine, "that in his youth my husband did his cousin a great unkindness—nay, a wrong. He could not help it; she made him so unhappy. But all that is past now, and I—I made him happy. And she has made us rich—this good Cousin Silence."

"Not rich exactly," Roderick confusedly explained. "It is only an old house, with perhaps two or three hundred a year."

"Two or three hundred a year! Why, that is a fortune, an absolute fortune! Let us bless the good God for it! Silence, my child, I shall not leave you in poverty."

She burst into tears, and then, wholly oblivious of the stranger's presence, mother and daughter fell into one another's arms and sobbed together.

Roderick knew not what to do. The sight of joy, as of sorrow, in any earnest, simple, passionate form, was to him almost unknown. He had never witnessed, even in womankind, anything beyond respectable grief and decorous pleasure. He remembered how, in her inmost pangs of widowhood, his mother had counted, with evident satisfaction, the ninety-seven letters of condolence which she had received; and he doubted if any family event, even a daughter's marriage, would have produced in her such a gush of emotion as he now witnessed in these poor Swiss ladies. What straits they must have gone through; how terrible must have been their fear of poverty, when a few paltry hundreds could so brighten the future as thus to affect them both.

Roderick could not understand it at all; but he—

could it be said he enjoyed it? Anyhow, he stood gazing at them in a passion of silent sympathy; until, afraid if he stayed longer he should commit himself in some frantic way that would make these gentle ladies consider him as a dangerous lunatic, and cut his acquaintance for evermore, he stole quietly out of the room and house, leaving a message that he would do himself the honour to call the next day and explain his sudden departure.

Then he ran down the steep staircase, nor paused once to think till he found himself in the safe, calm moonlight by the lake shore.

CHAPTER VI.

HEAVEN UPON EARTH.

"MARRY in haste and repent at leisure," was a saying Roderick had often quoted to his mother, when she urged him to that rash proceeding; and had instanced sagely the extreme imprudence of certain young fellows of his acquaintance, who, seeing a pretty face in a ball-room, had run after it, hunted it down—only too easily! caught it, married it—and woke up to find it a mere pretty face—no more.

"An Elle-maid, mother," he had said, laughing, one day. "I don't want to marry an Elle-maid."

"What's that?"

"A young lady something like a tin jelly-mould, only to be viewed on the outside. Now I would like a whole woman for my wife, including brains and a heart; and if I could get her, I would serve for her, like Jacob, for even seven years."

"Seven years? Nonsense! It was only seven weeks

from the day I first met your dear father till the day he married me."

"Was it, mother?" Roderick had answered briefly, and dropped the conversation.

"*Festina lente*" is a most true aphorism; and yet, like most aphorisms, it has its reverse side. Fate now and then throws into a few days—a few hours—the history and experience of years.

From that auspicious morning when he had discovered himself to his Swiss "cousins," as he persisted in calling them, there was scarcely a day in which Roderick did not see them—at their own home or elsewhere. For the dear little town opened its arms at once to the handsome and courteous young Englishman, the friend of M. Reynier, the new-found kinsman of Madame Jardine.

He was invited everywhere—to pleasant family dinners, homely as elegant, and never later than one o'clock; to social evenings, beginning at six and ending at half-past nine, after which—O felicity!—he often used the right of cousinship to walk with Madame Jardine and her daughter through the silent streets and by the placid lake-side, home.

It was a kind of society the very opposite pole of that at Richerden. Nobody was rich, and almost everybody was more or less well-educated. Consequently refinement and cultivation were everything—wealth was nothing. Roderick sometimes thought, with no small amusement, how ignorant everybody was of his own "well-off" condition, and how little it would have advantaged him here, at least with the families he liked best, such as M. Reynier's, who had been "savants" for generations, and Madame Jardine's, who said calmly,

"We are poor, we have always been poor; but we do not mind it. Our poverty has never lost us one real friend, nor made us a single enemy worth fearing."

She often said things of this sort, simple and wise,

to the young man, in the many hours he spent beside her sofa, devoting himself to her in her patient invalidism, in a way that his own mother and sisters would have thought impossible. Chiefly to her, for he soon recognized and accepted the exceedingly distant terms upon which young ladies and young gentlemen always meet in foreign society, even such a simple society as this. He scarcely disliked it, for if it was a barrier between himself and his love—it effectually kept off all other lovers. Not one of the various young men of Neuchâtel was, he soon saw, more than the merest acquaintance of Mademoiselle Jardine.

He too, at a month's end, had never once been alone for five minutes with his Cousin Silence, had scarcely ever touched her hand—that dear, lovely hand, on which he sometimes saw in fancy the plain gold ring which he, and he alone, was to put upon it, when he asked that it might lead and guide him through life. It could, he was sure. Little as he had talked with her, he had watched her very closely, and seen in her, by a thousand small indications of character—

“The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill:
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, and command.”

Ay, gentle as she was, he had already found out, by the flash of her blue eye when encountering anything mean or base, that she was able both to “warn” and to “command.” But he was too strong himself to be afraid of a woman's strength; and, oh! when he looked into those pure eyes, seeing not only them, but heaven beyond them—how he prayed that they might guide him through this world, and meet him safely on the eternal shore!

For now all the things which his father had sometimes said—only half understood then—came back upon him, and that passionate craving for perfect union here and hereafter, which constitutes the only perfect

love, seized upon every fibre of his being. They were both so young—so very young!—and yet he already dared to look to the time when they should be old, when all the delights of youth should have faded away. But he would love her still, and want her still. He could imagine no condition of being when he did not want her, when he ceased to feel that earth—nay, heaven itself—would be empty without her. But all this while he had not spoken a word.

And she?

Close as their companionship had become, it was still an absolutely mute companionship. She went on her way, as calm and moonlike as ever, doing her daily duties, which seemed endless, without reference to him at all. With her teaching, her housekeeping, her ceaseless charge of her mother, she was always active, always busy, in a way that, to Roderick, accustomed to live among women who wasted half their day in weary, luxurious idleness, appeared something marvellous.

“How is it that mademoiselle finds time to do so much?” he said once to the mother, who lay watching her child—not the only watcher on that and many another day.

“She does not find time, monsieur, she makes it. We poor people are obliged to learn this; and I hope she will not unlearn it, even when she is a rich woman.”

Roderick smiled, and said no more. He had not explained very much of business affairs, being, indeed, waiting anxiously till he could get an answer from his lawyer as to the possibility of transferring Miss Jardine’s property to her Swiss relations, without the latter’s suspecting that they had not inherited it direct. Until then, he persuaded himself, and wrote to persuade his mother, though in the wariest and briefest terms, that it was his “duty” to remain at Neuchâtel.

He likewise argued that it was far too late in the year for travelling or sight-seeing, and it was only

when Mademoiselle Jardine one day represented to him, with a spice of humour, real Scotch humour, which sometimes flashed out in her, how ignominious it would be to go back home without ever having seen Mont Blanc, that he planned a day at Lausanne—a whole day—if his kind cousin would accompany him and take care of him.

“And I will take care of madame your mother,” he said, tenderly. “She shall travel with every possible luxury that she will let me provide. Indeed,” he added, smiling, “I assure you I can afford it. I am, at least, as rich as—*as mademoiselle ma cousine* will be presently, if she chooses to take possession of Blackhall.”

So it was arranged for the first fine day, which turned out to be one of those heavenly days which come even in November—transmuting the whole world into a beauty sweeter even than that of summer. As they sat in the railway carriage, they three alone together (Roderick had provided for that and every other possible luxury and comfort with a carefulness deliciously sweet and new), he and the mother talked together, and Silence looked out of the window, absorbed in the delight of her rare holiday. It was not a very pretty country, the level region, half pasture, half vineyards, round the head of the lake, but she watched it with eyes which seemed to enjoy everything so intensely that she never noticed the eyes of the two who were watching her.

Suddenly these met—the mother’s and the lover’s. Roderick started and blushed painfully.

“I am glad it is such a fine day,” said he, hurriedly. “We might not have had another, and, as soon as my sister’s marriage day is fixed, I shall have to think of returning home.”

Madame Jardine regarded him with sudden sharp inquiry.

“Home? Yes, certainly; yes, *monsieur* ought to be

going home. He will probably not revisit Switzerland for some time ? ”

All the blood left the young man's face ; he could keep up the sham of conversation no longer.

“ Do you wish me not to return, madame ? Do you dislike me ? Does *she* dislike me ? ”

The words were said in the lowest whisper, and the hand he laid on Madame Jardine's trembled violently, till it was conscious of a feeble pressure, while a faint smile brightened the kind, worn face.

“ Madame,” he said, still in a whisper, “ if I am alive I will return, and speedily. You must surely have understood that by this time.”

She looked him full in the eyes—an eager, questioning, almost pathetic look.

“ Yes ; you are good and true—I feel sure of it. I am satisfied.”

This was all, for immediately afterwards Silence turned round, making some innocent, unconscious remark about their journey. But fixed in Roderick's mind, with a thankfulness that afterwards became almost awe, were those few words—what he had said to the mother, and what the mother had answered.

She scarcely spoke another word, being tired, and owning it, which was rare ; for she was the most patient and uncomplaining of invalids. She left the other two to talk together. And so Silence, forced out of her shyness, if indeed it were shyness, and not a reticent maidenly repose, began to unfold, leaf by leaf, like a rose in sunshine. To Roderick, dreaming so long of the ideal womanhood which was to complete his manhood, and make that perfect oneness of married union which all hope for and so few find, it was truly like walking in a garden of roses.

“ I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse.” The sister of his soul, as well as the spouse of his heart—there is a deep meaning in those words. He could believe it all when he looked into those dear eyes.

There are many so-called loves quite simple and comprehensible; passions, selfish and sensuous; fancies, roused often by vanity; rational, systematic, deliberate affections; but when the real love happens—the one great love which nothing ever alters, and which death alone destroys (no, not death even, God grant!)—it is always a mystery from beginning to end. Even they who feel it cannot understand it. There it is, rooted in the very core of them—life's supremest delight or sharpest agony. No effort can conquer it, no argument reason it down. Reciprocal or not, happy or not, it is there—a part of their being. Why it came, or what it is—this passionate necessity of one for another, only one other, none else—as deep in its way as the necessity of the human heart for God; whether it was meant for this life only, and whether, missing this life, it will find its satisfaction in the life to come, as many poor souls have died joyfully believing—who can tell?

Roderick could not. He only knew he was happy—perfectly and contentedly happy—that the mere sense of her sitting beside him, the mere sound of her voice in his ear, filled him with entire, satisfied rest, even as he believed he should feel (and with a strange jump his fancy even then took in the pathetically foolish thought) thirty or forty years hence, when he was old and grey-headed, and her sweet girlish face was as faded as her mother's; yet he would be himself and she herself—everything in the world that to him was lovely, precious, and dear.

Poor young things! happy in a bliss still tremulous and serene, like the dawn before daylight, and which perhaps might only come again in the twilight before the dark. Any older person would have regarded them with a tenderness almost akin to tears.

“Is it Lausanne already?” said Silence, and then blushed, a vivid scarlet blush, the first Roderick had ever seen on her calm, colourless face. It made him start—nay, even tremble, as a young king might on

suddenly hearing at the door the feet of the messengers who bring him a longed-for crown, which when it comes, he is almost afraid to wear.

But it was Lausanne railway station—he must rouse himself. The dream-world was come to an end; the practical world began.

An hour afterwards he had safely located his charges at the house of a friend of Madame Jardine's, where she was thankful to rest, had shared the hospitable meal, and was lingering uneasily about, shy and strange, when some one remarked that the English monsieur ought certainly to climb La Signale, and see what all travellers know is one of the finest views in Switzerland. But there was no one to show him the way, except two little boys, sons of the house, and Silence.

A sudden impulse, as of a man who is determined to have his way, conquered Roderick's diffidence.

"Madame, will you trust her with me? It is not Swiss fashion, I know, but in England I should be thought good knight enough to deserve the charge of any fair damsel, if she would so far condescend. *Made-moiselle ma cousine?*"

Silence looked up, looked down, and smiled. The mother cast a penetrating glance at the two, so innocently happy in one another's company.

"The good God makes it, not I," muttered she to herself. "My daughter, you, Adolphe, and Henri will show the view to our dear English cousin. He will acknowledge there is scarcely a more beautiful sight to be seen in this world."

He did acknowledge it, when, having climbed the steep hill alone—for Silence mounted merrily with a big school-boy at either hand—he saw the whole lake from Geneva to Montreux, with its girdle of mountains, from Mont Blanc to the Bernese Alps, spread before him like a picture, as still and as clear.

All stood and gazed, till, the boys slipping away to some frolic or other, the little group was reduced to

two. Neither spoke for ever so long—merely stood together. He could barely see her profile; she was as absorbed as she had been that day at Berne. If she felt she was not alone, felt who was beside her, at any rate she did not show it. There was no restlessness, no wish to attract notice. Nothing but supreme content was in the sweet, firm mouth and earnest, out-looking eyes. If she were capable of love, it was a love so self-controlled, so entirely free alike from the delirium and the selfishness of passion, that the man who won it might well esteem himself as happy as the mythical Endymion, or Acis, or Numa Pompilius—Roderick thought of them all. Every man's first love is, or ought to be, a sort of goddess, something half divine; but it seemed to him he could better understand heaven when he looked into this girl's eyes—as he did at last.

Then she spoke.

“Is this as beautiful as you expected, *mon cousin*?”

“Yes; almost as beautiful as that view from Berne. Do you remember it—the day I first saw you? which seems years ago.”

She bent her head in acquiescence, but said nothing. For him, he could not speak; a great awe was over him, even amidst the rapturous delight.

“Look,” she said at last, pointing westward.

Suddenly, through the grey, cloudy sky, the sun broke out, poured down a torrent of light, like a cataract of molten gold, into the lake, then spanned it with a bridge of rays from shore to shore.

“Oh, how lovely!” cried Roderick, and both of them, shading their eyes from the dazzling glory, stood watching it, till the descending sun, suddenly touching the verge of the mist, plunged into it and disappeared.

“Is all ended?”

“Not quite,” said Silence; “wait a minute more.” And through the deathlike greyness which had fallen instantaneously upon mountains, lake, and sky, he

percieved a gradual, wonderful change. "See!" She spoke in English, and touching him—the lightest possible touch, yet it thrilled through every nerve—pointed to the mountains nearest the sunset.

What a sight! Slowly a faint colour, like a blush, crept over the "everlasting snows," deepening more and more as it spread from summit to summit along the whole range of Alps.

"It looks as if an angel were stepping from peak to peak with a basket of roses."

"Yes," Roderick answered, also beneath his breath; "only their colour is not like earthly roses. We shall never see the like again till we see it in paradise. Please God we may!"

As he said the *we*, deliberately, markedly, intentionally, he saw a faint trembling in the sweet mouth, firmly closed though it was; and coming a little closer he took hold—not of her hand, but of her dress. Like a revelation, which some will no more believe in than a blind man could believe in that wondrous sight before these two, there came into him—perhaps into both—the love, the one passionate, yet pure and perfect love, of one man for one woman, which, if both have strength to accept and be true to its blessedness, makes all life a joy, and death itself no longer a fear.

For even then, standing close beside her, with the mere touch of her garments and the stirring of her hair giving him a rapture indescribable, Roderick could think of death, of his own dead. Strangely enough the first words he said were—

"Oh, if my father could but have seen this sight!"

"Perhaps he does see it, and mine too. They were friends when they were young."

"Yes. And we? We must be friends all our lives."

"I hope so."

"Friend" was the only word he dared to say—a wiser word than he was aware of; for friends may be

lovers some day, but lovers who are not friends will soon cease to be both.

The "colorization" slowly faded, and that cold, grey, deathly shade which comes so suddenly after sunset here began to creep over sky and lake and mountains—even over Silence's face; till there came into those far-away eyes of hers an expression—Roderick could have imagined it that of an angel standing by a sealed grave, but looking upwards still, waiting for the resurrection day.

Love, like death, has its euthanasia—moments which seem to bridge the gulf between mortal and immortal, or in which, from some height of joy or woe, we see our whole life spread out, before us and behind. But soon we drop from this high mountain into the common-place valley of daily existence, and trudge along quiet as heretofore.

A few minutes after Roderick followed Silence down the hill, which she descended as she had mounted, with a boy on either hand, and all went back to tea—that simple Swiss tea which he had long since begun to prefer to the grandest of Richerden dinners. Very pleasant it was, but quite common-place, with Silence cutting bread-and-butter for the boys, who evidently adored her with all their schoolboy hearts, or waiting sedulously on her mother, who lay on the sofa, saying only she was "very tired," and smiling still, but plainly more ailing than usual.

Dull too, to a certain extent, was the journey home, for Silence had neither eyes, ears, nor thoughts for any creature except her mother; and Roderick, in the re-action after strong suppressed feeling, half fancied himself *de trop*. Shrinking into a corner, he scarcely spoke to either, but soothed himself by taking the tenderest silent care of both mother and daughter till he deposited them at their own door.

That kindly "Bon soir!"—"Au revoir!"—just the ordinary adieu which had taken place at that door so

many times ; this time it was almost briefer than usual, for he saw Silence was glad to get her mother home ; and he, too, was not sorry to rush away, afraid lest the strong self-repression of the last few hours might give way, and betray him by some unguarded look or tone. So he hurried down the stairs, having seen them safe, but scarcely looked at either, scarcely even answered Madame Jardine's gentle " *Au revoir !* "

" *Au revoir !* " How strange it all felt afterwards !

CHAPTER VII.

EARTH ONCE MORE.

RODERICK scarcely slept all night—a new experience to his young healthy nature ; or, sleeping, woke fancying he was falling down precipices, or Silence was falling, and he was leaping in after her—all those vague troubles in which dreams carry out the prominent idea of the day.

He rose gladly, but only rose to vexation ; no letter from his mother, but one from the family lawyer, saying Mrs. Jardine had been consulting with him, and that she altogether objected to her son's denuding himself of his patrimony, the only absolute property he possessed, and giving it to unknown foreign cousins, who might " make ducks and drakes of it " in no time.

Spite of his annoyance, Roderick could not help laughing. The idea of Silence and her mother as extravagant spendthrifts, bringing to ruin the Jardine inheritance, was too comical. He had not been lucid enough, and must write again and explain—what ? If he told his mother the whole truth, that he had deliberately made up his mind, and meant, if by God's

blessing he was fortunate in his love, to bring her home as a daughter-in-law this portionless Swiss girl—probably the very last daughter-in-law she would have expected or desired—how would she take it? What would happen?

In this serious business light he had never before regarded the question; and, though it perplexed him, it gave him also a delicious sense of reality. His nebulous passion was resolving itself into the clear, steady glow of a fixed love, a love meant to end in those solemn duties of married life, which all good men are born for, and good women too; and which neither sex can shirk, or set aside, or by any sad fate lose, without involving a certain incompleteness in character and destiny.

"Yes; I must write again to my mother," he said to himself, and even took up pen and paper.

But how to write? That tender confidence—from babyhood to manhood—which sometimes exists between mother and son, had never existed here. "She would not understand." And the pen fell, and the mind drifted off into airy dreams.

At last he decided that to tell his mother all about his future wife, whom he had never yet, by word or sign, asked to be his wife—and who might never love him after all—would be an unwise, even an indelicate thing. A girl's sensitive pride might well revolt at his having taken it for granted he had but to ask and to have.

"I, who if she only knew it am not worthy to tie her shoe-string. I, so lazy, so thoughtless, so full of myself; while she—she never thinks of herself from morning till night. Oh! my darling! my darling!"

And, midst all his insane adoration of his goddess, there came into the young man's heart a rift of true manly tenderness—the taking care of a woman, the making of her not only his angel, but his "darling."

"I must go and see her, just to find out if she is not over-tired, or over-anxious about her mother."

Glad of this or any other excuse that brought him to the sweet presence, which was becoming as necessary to him as daily food, he sallied out, threading delightfully the muddy streets, and leaping, two steps at once, up the familiar stairs.

Half-way he met the three demoiselles Reynier, who told him that Madame Jardine was "au lit," and Silence "très occupée." And a slight smile which he fancied he saw on their faces at his evident disappointment made the young man decide on turning back with them at once, and making himself as agreeable as possible to these pleasant young ladies, all the way home.

He was not conceited, young Roderick Jardine. Whatever his faults were, the petty vanity of liking to have his name coupled with that of some "nice girl" had never been one of them. Now, more than ever, was he to the last degree sensitive on this head. That her friends should smile or joke, or guess in the smallest way that Silence was dear to him, till he had told her herself how dear she was—the thing was horrible and unendurable!

With a self-control that did him credit—for his young cheek changed and his heart beat like a woman's all the while—he carried on gay badinage with these gay Swiss girls, telling them, quite unconcernedly, the whole story of yesterday, and answering, as frankly as possible, their questions about his sister's marriage, and his much-to-be-regretted but quite inevitable departure home, till they went indoors, satisfied that he had no matrimonial intentions of his own whatever; these English were so very peculiar!

He was peculiar, even among Englishmen. When he quitted these fair maidens, having thrown as much dust in their eyes as conscience and truth permitted, he wandered about the little town, restless as a man

who has picked up a diamond, which he can neither wear nor show—which he dreads any one's seeing, and yet feels as if everybody must know of the treasure he proudly hides.

With all its remaining uncertainty he was wildly happy in his secret. His fate was in his own hands—a man's fate in love always is, as no woman's ever can be. He could speak—he could woo—he could plead—with the passionate resolve that continually works out its own ends. "Love me or love me not, I love you; and I shall love you for ever."

And he felt within him the strength of a man who loves—not himself, but the woman who has become to him a nobler and dearer self—for whom even the desire of possession fades before the ideal worship of the ideal woman. That mean but too common thought,

"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"

never entered this young fellow's mind. She was herself; he was himself; and, whatever happened to either, he could not choose but love her, and love her to the end.

I do not say this kind of love is to be found every day, or in every man; but it is possible to some men, and it was the only form of the passion that was possible to such a man as Roderick Jardine.

But it was a passion, not a mere sentimental fancy. He had written poetry in his time, but he wrote none now. In his walks up and down—from sheer restlessness he walked nearly all day long—he avoided the street where she lived, lest anybody might notice him; and his mind kept running continually, not upon dreams, but practicalities—things he had never taken any heed of before—what was the exact amount of his own independent income; where he should live; and how, also, supposing he could not reconcile his mother to this plan of divesting himself of Miss Jardine's

money before marriage, in what way he could best do it afterwards.

For the natural instinct of a generous man—to give his wife everything, to shelter her from all possible injury or wrong—had come, in all its passionate intensity, into Roderick's heart, sweeping away selfish greed, pleasure-loving folly—all the little demons that are so prone to enter into empty chambers. He had none. There was not a corner of his being which she had not possessed herself of, in undoubted sovereignty, "my Queen!—my Queen!"

He hummed it continually, this little silly song, yet felt himself the wisest of mortals; and many a worldly-wise old man, looking back on a similar passage of existence, may incline to say, with a sigh, "Who knows? perhaps he may have been."

Now and then a qualm came over him. Was all this castle-building real? Suppose a girl's light "No" should make all the fabric crumble into dust? But she was not one who did anything lightly. You had but to look into her eyes and see that no coquetry was possible to her. Nor indecision either. She would be quite sure to know her own mind. She would either love or not love: and, if she did love, it would be for ever.

Though he had no tangible grounds whatever to go upon—not a look, not a word—except that brief reply, uttered with downcast eyes and a tremble in the voice, when he wished they might be friends for life—"I hope we may"—still somehow he felt that she liked—perhaps loved him. In later life, when the worldly crust grows over both, it may be different; but these two—mere boy and girl as it were—they had neither deceits nor disguises. Beyond the natural solemnity of asking the question on the answer to which depends the whole future of one—nay, two lives—Roderick was not afraid.

Nevertheless, in writing to his mother, as he at last

did write, determining to pay her the just filial respect of telling her his intentions before he made the offer of marriage, he explained that he had no idea what Mademoiselle Jardine's answer would be; and he begged her to keep his secret entirely to herself until he could tell her the result.

A plain, brief, and very business-like letter it was, taking entirely for granted that his mother loved him well enough to rejoice in his happiness; and yet a lurking fear would come.

"If only she"—the one she in the world now—"had more style; if she dressed better, as the girls would say," thought he to himself, with a return of that fraternal cynicism to which he had been liable, but which he had almost forgotten since he came to Neuchâtel—since he saw those heavenly, innocent eyes. They rose up before him now. "Oh! my darling—made of every creature's best—forgive!"

And the ties of blood, which do not necessarily include sympathy, seemed slender and poor compared with those of what philosophers call "elective affinity," which the lover finds, or thinks he has found, in his mistress, and which, if he does not afterwards find in his wife, God help him! for it makes life very hard.

"So the deed is done—thus far," said Roderick to himself, as he posted the letter, and then braced his courage for the next step. For he judged rightly—no English wooing, trusting to sweet chance and the impulse of the moment, would do here. He must speak to the mother first. Until he won her approval he could never be to Silence more, ostensibly, than a common acquaintance.

Trying, but inevitable. So that very evening—giving the gentle invalid a whole day to recover from her fatigue—he determined to present himself, and ask formally of Madame Jardine permission to woo her daughter. Perhaps he might then be allowed to tell Silence himself all she was to him. And when she

understood it—the first look, eye to eye; the first kiss, mouth to mouth; the open, mutual recognition of a love that was to last them through life, and go with them, please God, into the life eternal—at the bare thought of such bliss the young man felt almost dizzy.

He half staggered as he walked, and at last stood quite still at the solitary street corner—the street he knew so well—to command himself before he attempted to mount the stair. Though it was still early, all was dark—the quiet darkness of a mild November night, with the stars shining overhead. Roderick looked up at them, trying to gain a little quietness too.

So standing, he scarcely noticed a gentleman, almost as self-absorbed as himself, till they ran right against one another.

“Pardon, monsieur,” said the kindly voice of M. le Professeur Reynier. “What, Monsieur Jardine—can it be you? How fortunate! I was just coming to pay you a little visit.”

Roderick muttered some civil answer, but did not offer to turn back. Indeed, he had come to that point when he felt he could not turn back—could not defer his bliss, or fate, another hour, for any mortal creature.

“I—another time I shall be most happy. Now—I have an engagement.”

“Pardon again,” said the gentle old man, touching the arm of the younger one; “but—were you going there?” He pointed up the stair which he had just descended. “Indeed, you must not go!”

“Why not?” said Roderick, angrily; then, recollecting himself, added, with a careful indifference: “your daughters told me Madame Jardine was not well; I was going to inquire for her.”

“Mon Dieu!” cried Monsieur Reynier, clasping his hands with a gesture which we unemotional islanders would smile at as “so un-English!” “Mon Dieu!—then monsieur does not know?”

“Know what?”

"She is dead—she died this morning."

"She—who?"

"Madame Jardine, alas! It was quite sudden—there was nobody beside her but her daughter. Quite peaceful, too—without any suffering; and the doctor had dreaded much one day, for it was disease of the heart. Her child's only thought now is thankfulness for that. Poor Mademoiselle Silence! Madame Reynier is with her now—she, or my girls, will not leave her until the interment."

Here the old man fairly gave way, took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his honest eyes. Roderick wrung his hand in the silent English way—no more. He was utterly stunned.

"I know monsieur will think I am very foolish, but I cannot help it. My old friend's widow—and she so good a woman—and only four days since she was at our house. Indeed, I saw her for a few moments yesterday. She had some idea—yes, I think she always had a faint idea—that at any moment she might be taken. More than once has she confided to me, in such a case, her dear child, whom she leaves alone in the world. But Silence does not feel that yet—she does not think of herself at all. 'Never mind me; the good God will take care of me!' was all she said, looking up with that piteous pale face and those big eyes, when I left her, not five minutes ago."

Roderick stood absolutely silent. The stream of gentle, querulous French seemed to run into his brain and out again, leaving no distinct impression there. It had been such a bright dream-life since he came to the little town, and the Reynier family were mixed up in it all. It seemed impossible that upon this pleasantness outside, this inner passion just coming to its climax, its struggle of hope and fear, could fall the paralyzing hand of Death.

"It can't be true! it can't be true!" he said in English, putting his hand to his head.

“Monsieur is very much shocked, I see; and no wonder. I, too, can scarcely comprehend or believe it. But we must leave all in the hands of the good God. He will take care of her, as she said, poor child! even though she is left an orphan, without any *dot*, without a penny in the world. But I will not detain monsieur any longer. Bon soir! Au revoir!”

The very words she had said to him in her brief adieu, only two nights before on this very spot—the sweet soul who was now “beyond the sun.” Roderick’s heart gave way, with a great sob, like a child’s.

And then he choked it down and turned away. To no human being would he betray himself—not now.

“Monsieur,” and he drew the old man’s arm through his with a tender courtesy, “you will allow me to accompany you home. Then perhaps I may be honoured by hearing a little more—perhaps assisting you in the arrangements you will have to make. Remember I am a relative—I believe, the very nearest relative now left to Mademoiselle Jardine.”

“Yes, yes, yes; I am very grateful. And she, too, poor child! she cannot but be grateful also for monsieur’s goodness. Let us go.”

So they went together—the old man talking volubly and cordially, the younger one replying in little more than monosyllables, through the already empty streets of the little town.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEATH IN THE HOUSE.

THERE are two kinds of love—man's love; I am not speaking of woman's just now. The first, born of sunshiny selfishness, basking in pleasure, shrinking from any pain, either its own or that of the object beloved, which is, for the time being, itself; the second, strong as tender, while equally capable of pleasure, fears not pain, either personal or vicarious. Sorrow, suffering, the helplessness of failing powers, only rouse in it a deeper passion, a fonder care. Happy the woman who has found her resting-place there! She need fear neither sickness nor sorrow, old age nor beauty's decline. Living however sad and broken a life, she will be cherished to the last; and dying, she will be mourned eternally.

Such a love, though he knew it not at the time—indeed, he hardly knew himself at all, so suddenly and strangely had circumstances developed his dormant nature—such a love, in all its devotedness and intensity, had taken possession of Roderick's heart for his "Cousin" Silence.

If, a few hours before, he had been bent upon asking her for his wife, now he almost felt as if she were his wife; as if Fate, stepping in, had absolutely thrown her into his arms. He held her there—fast, fast. No earthly power, except her own will, should ever drag her thence or put her from him.

But he was still quite silent, as was inevitable. Though he stayed all the evening with the Reyniers, he never betrayed himself by a single word. Instead of going to bed he went back to the street where she lived, and walked up and down it till long after mid-

night, watching the faint glimmer of light in the upper rooms which told that there was death in the house.

He tried to fancy her sitting there; either in the silent chamber where, they said, she best liked to be, quiet and tearless, or in the salon beside good Madame Reynier, who had cut out for her a plain black dress, and set her to work at it, feeling that doing even that was better for her than doing nothing. Her principal thought, Sophie Reynier said, seemed to be to give as little trouble as possible to anybody.

"Oh, she is an angel!" the warm-hearted Swiss girl had cried, with her tears down-dropping as she spoke. And Roderick had forgotten himself so far as to turn and grasp her hand gratefully—this good eldest sister of a large family, already betrothed to a young pasteur. Perhaps that made her at once clear-sighted and wise, for she half smiled through her tears, and said nothing.

It did not matter: all small outside things seemed to matter little now. What the Reynier family thought of him, his feelings or intentions, Roderick did not know, nor did he much care. He had listened calmly while they talked her over; speculated how much she would have to live upon; finally decided that she should be asked to come and stay with them after the funeral, and remain with them till she could get a situation as governess—"perhaps in England, as she knows English so well, monsieur might hear of something?" And monsieur had answered "yes" with the greatest calmness, hugging himself in his own speechless content.

Helpless, poor, with not a friend in the world except these kind Reyniers: it was exactly what he would most have desired! Certain young fellows of his acquaintance, who never committed themselves to the smallest attentions before finding out whether or not a girl had "lots of money," would, he knew, have regarded him with contemptuous pity—but he? To

snatch up his penniless darling just as she was, to shelter her in his bosom, to load her with luxuries, to make her his one object of ceaseless tenderness and devoted care, seemed to him the acme of human felicity!

He did not attempt to see her—that, of course, was impossible: and he felt capable of making any sacrifice, or exercising any self-restraint for her sake: but it seemed as if only to be near her, throwing over her the faithful shield of his silent love, was at once a consolation and a protection.

He walked the street till all lights went out, except that solemn one which marked the death-chamber; and then, with a blessing on his lips and a prayer in his heart—young man as he was, Roderick was not ashamed to pray—he departed.

Next morning, at the very earliest hour he could venture without exciting suspicion, he was at the Reyniers' door, to hear all that was to be heard concerning Mademoiselle Jardine, and to volunteer any help that he delicately could to the professeur—who, he saw, was a little perplexed and unpractical—in arranging the details of the funeral. Nay, it being a pelting wet day, and the old man very rheumatic, he succeeded in being allowed himself to go and choose the grave, in the pretty cemetery which all the Neuchâtellois are so proud of, and where he had been taken by Madame Jardine herself, one sunshiny Sunday afternoon, almost the first Sunday he came to the town.

How long that seemed ago; and how strange it was that he should be standing there, choosing a resting-place for this dear dead woman, of whose very existence he was ignorant a few weeks ago! Yet now he mourned her almost like a son, and thought of her solemnly, tenderly, as the mother of his wife to be, if God gave him that blessing. Perhaps, looking even farther than that, into the dim future, his thoughts

ran on, as human thoughts will run on. But he stopped them.

"Oh, my darling, my darling!" Somehow he never now thought of her as anything but his "darling." "If you give yourself to me I will be faithful to the trust. God do so to me, and more also;" unconsciously he used the familiar Bible phrase, and spoke half aloud, as if, in the total solitude, the spirit of the yet unburied dead were listening to him out of her strange new heaven. "May God forsake me in my need if ever I forsake this orphan child!"

He was but a few years her senior, yet she seemed a child, and he a man, now. He had grown ten years older in the last twenty-four hours.

Coming back to the Reyniers, he explained all he had done in the most matter-of-fact and unemotional way. He seemed suddenly to have gained the power of unlimited self-restraint, for her sake. To do everything for her that could possibly be done, and never to let her know it, was all he desired.

The tidings of her were just the same; an English person would have said she was "keeping up well." To these warm-hearted, demonstrative Swiss she appeared passive, almost cold. It was her Scotch blood, they said, which had always made her a little unlike themselves. But more like him and his, thought Roderick, more like the Silence Jardine with whose very name, and, he fancied, much of her very nature, she would appear at Blackhall.

The third day was arranged for the funeral. The only communication that passed between him and Mademoiselle Jardine had been a request he sent by Sophie Reynier, that he might be allowed to attend it, in right of relationship, and Silence sent him word back that she was "grateful."

This done, there was no more to do for her; nothing but to wander restlessly about through the long dreary winter day and wonder how she was bearing it;

whether he would ever be able to make the world feel like summer to her again. Instead of his passion—or, rather, underneath his passion—had come a tenderness almost motherly. He could have sat and watched—watched and guarded—never asking for word or look, indifferent even to responsive love, if only he might have the right to love *her*. The very hardest bit to him of all this time was those few hours when, having done all that was possible for him to do, and having no excuse for inflicting himself further on the Reynier family, he went back to his hotel and tried to lead his ordinary life there—eating, drinking, and sleeping; for he had no young men's small vices; he thought billiards dull, and detested smoking. He could not, this night, even read; and it was not until he woke next morning that it occurred to him he ought to write again to his mother, who would just be receiving his letter of two days before.

Another two days, and he would get an answer. Best so, perhaps. In the few words that he was determined at all hazards to say to his darling before he left—to herself only, regardless of ceremony or custom—the sanction of his mother's approbation would be a help and a consolation. He should be able to tell the orphan that it was not his arms alone that were open to receive her, but those of a new mother, ready to replace, if any ever could replace, in some small degree her who was gone. Very unlike they were, and he had a secret fear that it was a different sort of a daughter-in-law Mrs. Jardine would have preferred—one much grander, richer, handsomer. Silence had the loveliness of loveliness; but even in his wildest passion, her lover knew she was not handsome. Still, in spite of all, there were two things he never doubted to find in his mother—her strong good sense and her warm heart.

To these he trusted, and felt he might safely trust, the girl he loved—the girl who would make him all he

lacked, all that his mother wished him to be. He pleaded this in a letter, touchingly earnest and tender, which, on second thoughts, he determined on writing home. His heart was full—full to overflowing; and, almost for the first time in his life, he poured it out where, under such circumstances, every good son is right to pour his heart out—into his mother's bosom.

Going to the post, letter in hand—for he had learnt Silence's habit of doing things at once, and doing them herself, if possible—he met Sophie Reynier, in mourning dress, hastening to comfort and sustain her friend during the funeral day.

"Is it not rather sad," she said, "that this should be such a lovely day? Look at the lake; it is blue as heaven; and the Alps, they are all *découverts*. Ah, such a day as our poor Madame Jardine always enjoyed so much; and she is to be buried this afternoon!"

Roderick did not reply.

"See, I am taking these few flowers—all I can get—to lay on her breast before the coffin is closed. She was so fond of flowers, as she was of everything beautiful. And she looks so beautiful now, you cannot imagine; and quite young again. Even poor Silence does not weep when we stand beside her. Ah, it is a certain consolation—the beauty one often sees in *les morts*."

"I have never yet seen death," said Roderick, walking back with her. "Strange at my age; but so it is. I was very ill after my father died; they would not let me look at him again, and I have never known any other loss."

"Monsieur is fortunate—exceptionally fortunate."

"I do not know that. Those are blessed who, like you, mademoiselle, have an instinct for sorrow, who go about comforting all the afflicted of this world. One cannot do that unless one understands."

"Perhaps not," said gentle Sophie Reynier, of whom he had only spoken the simple truth; but of

every one near Silence, Roderick was disposed to think and speak the very pleasantest truth he could.

As they walked, he was seized with a great longing to behold once more the face of the dead—the face which had never looked on him but kindly — *her* mother's face, which would so soon pass away from every remembrance except hers—and his.

“Do you think you could take me into the house with you?” he pleaded. “Nobody would know, or be harmed thereby. In my country we even think it a tribute of respect to the dead to be allowed to look at them once more. And Mademoiselle Jardine——”

Sophie Reynier suddenly turned to him with a flash of womanly emotion in her kind blue eyes—penetrating as kind.

“Monsieur, you are an honest man — what in England you call a ‘gentleman.’ You could never act otherwise than kindly to such a defenceless creature as Mademoiselle Jardine?”

“God forbid, no!”

“Then I will take you.”

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH AND LOVE.

SILENT as death itself, but with his heart beating in passionate life, Roderick stood beside Mademoiselle Reynier at the familiar door. Madame Reynier was gone out.

“So you cannot possibly come in with me, monsieur,” said the grave little Sophie. “But let us see. Return in an hour, at eleven; by then I shall have persuaded Silence to repose herself for a little. She

has not slept all night, and is very restless. She may hear you. Now go away, I pray you."

He obeyed at once, and went to search through the little town for a few more winter flowers, to "shut them inside the sweet, cold hand," like Browning's "Evelyn Hope," saying to himself the lines,—

"So, that is our secret. Go to sleep :

You will wake and remember and understand."

For, to his dreamy nature, death had as yet appeared only in its poetic side—its pathos and its mystery. The darkness and desolation of loss, the sad realities of sickness and mortality, were to him unknown, as they are to most young men. During these two days he had a little come into the shadow of them, but only in a secondary degree, and all under the glamour of his passionate love, which hallowed everything with a kind of supernatural glory.

As he stood in the salon of his hotel, arranging the little bouquet, and tying it up with a bit of white ribbon which he had gone into a shop and bought, his look was tender rather than sad, and, with all his reverence for the dead, he could not forbear thinking whether she — his living love — would notice the flowers, or ask who put them there.

"Monsieur, a telegram for monsieur !"

It startled him for the moment. Not being a man of business, Roderick was unaccustomed to telegrams ; besides, his mother had a strong, old-fashioned aversion to them. Yet this one came from her. At least, the address and name were hers, though the wording was in the third person.

"*Your mother is not well. Come home immediately.*"

This was all ; but it came with such a blow to Roderick, who inherited his father's nervous temperament, that he felt himself turning dizzy, and obeyed the friendly garçon's suggestion that monsieur had better sit down.

His mother ill? She, the healthiest person imaginable! and she had written to him only a few days before, saying nothing of herself except of her endless duties and engagements. It must be something serious. He was wanted "immediately." She could not have got his letter, there was indeed barely time, or surely she would have answered it. Perhaps she was too ill even to read it? His poor mother—his dear, good mother! All the son in him woke up: perhaps all the more for thinking of that other mother, whose dead face he was just going to see.

He might go—there was time; no Paris train started till afternoon, and, re-reading the telegram, it seemed a little less serious; though "not well" might be only a tender way of breaking to him a far sadder truth.

"O mother, mother!" he almost sobbed out, as he walked hastily along the lake-side, "if anything should happen to you! if I should lose you too, before I have learned to love you half enough."

And all the passionate remorse of a sensitive nature, a doubly sensitive conscience, rose up in the poor fellow's heart. He accused himself of a hundred imaginary shortcomings, and suffered as those are prone to suffer who judge others by the standard of themselves. It was only by a great effort that he controlled himself so as to present the quiet outside necessary, on reaching Madame Jardine's door.

Madame Jardine's door, from which she would soon go for ever; nay, from which she had already gone. He knew not whom to ask for. He stood silent and bewildered; but the little *bonne* seemed to understand, and admitted him without a word.

Beyond the salon was a small bed-chamber, which mother and daughter used to share. In the centre of it stood, raised a little, and covered with something white, that last sleeping-place in which we must all one day rest.

But it was not in the least like sleep; as when, left

quite alone, he approached the coffin and drew the face-cloth gently off, the young man acknowledged with a start. No human slumber, but total, perfect, divine repose; where all the anguish of life had been smoothed away, all the passions of life calmed down as if they had never existed.

His passion, only a minute before at fever-heat, listening eagerly for any sound in the silent house, suddenly sank into peace. *Something* was before him, beside him, around him; something which in all his days before he had never felt or understood. Life with its noisy clangours melted away before the eternal peace of death.

How long he stood there gazing on the still face, so exceedingly beautiful—he had never thought before what a beautiful woman she must once have been—Roderick could not tell. At last the door, which had been left ajar behind him, slightly stirred. He thought it was the *bonne*, and would not turn; he did not wish her to see his dimmed eyes.

It was more than a minute before he looked up and saw, standing quietly on the other side of the coffin, the orphaned girl, the girl whom he adored like a lover, and yet seemed to cherish already with the protecting tenderness of a husband who has been married many years.

Perfectly pallid, dead-white almost from the contrast between her black dress and fair hair, Silence stood and looked at him; merely looked, not holding out her hand—both her hands were resting on the coffin. She spoke in a whisper.

“You are come to see her once again? That is kind. She always liked you. Is she not beautiful? But she is gone, you see! She has gone away, and left me all alone.”

One sob; just one, no more. Nothing in his life had ever touched Roderick like the strong self-command by which this frail girl in her utmost agony

controlled its expression, and, recollecting herself, summoned all her courage, dignity—the sacred dignity of sorrow, which asks no help, no consolation.

“You must forgive me; my grief is new. Are these your flowers? Thank you; they are very sweet.”

And, taking them from him, she began arranging them in the folds of the shroud, gently and carefully, as if she were dressing a baby, then drew the kerchief once more over the dead face.

“Now you must go away.”

“I will,” he answered—the first words he had uttered. “Only, just once.”

Tenderly removing the face-cloth again, Roderick stooped and pressed his lips upon the marble brow of this dead mother, inly making a solemn vow—would that all men made the same, and kept it to other dead and living mothers!

Something of its purport must have been betrayed in his look, for, when his eyes met those of the girl opposite, she slightly started, and a faint colour suffused her cheek. Fading, it left her deadly pale; she staggered rather than walked, though alone, refusing all help, into the next room.

There she sat down, Roderick standing beside her. The door was open between, he could see the foot of the coffin, and its white drapery. Though now, for the first time, he was alone with his chosen love, knowing well, and having an instinct that she must know too, that she was his love, and ever would be, there was so great an awe upon him that he could not speak one word, not even of the commonest consolation or sympathy. He could have fallen on his knees before her and kissed her very feet, yet he dared not touch even the tips of her poor little pallid fingers, so strangely idle, their occupation gone.

“What am I to do without my mother?” Silence said, at last, with a piteous appeal, not to him, or to

anybody, except, perhaps, that One to whom alone the orphan can always go.

Roderick could bear it no longer; his manhood wholly deserted him. He turned away his head and wept. The two sat there ever so long, sobbing like children; and, like children—how it came about he hardly knew—holding one another's hands. That was all! No more indeed was possible, but it seemed to comfort her. Very soon she rose from her chair, quite herself—her quiet, grave self, robed in all the dignity of sorrow.

“Thank you; you have been very kind in coming to-day, and in wishing to come this afternoon, as I hope you will.”

Roderick had forgotten all about the telegram and his mother—everything in the world except Silence Jardine. He drew the paper out of his pocket and laid it before her. “Read this! I got it half an hour ago. Say, what must I do?”

Silence read slowly, and putting her hand once or twice over her forehead, as if trying hard to understand things, then looked up at him with compassionate eyes.

“Your mother ill? I am so sorry for you.” Then after a minute's pause, “You will go—and at once?”

“Yes; at once.”

Both spoke in whispers still, as if conscious of some sacred presence close beside them. He was, at least, feeling this; as if a soft, dead hand were laid on his wildly-beating heart, and sealing his passionate lips, else he could not possibly have controlled himself as he did.

“I feel I ought to go. But my mother may be better soon. She is very seldom ailing. As soon as ever I can, I shall come back again to Neuchâtel—to you. You believe that?”

“Yes.” One little word, uttered softly, with bent head, and, after an instant, repeated, “Yes.”

Roderick felt his brain almost whirling with the strong constraint he put upon himself.

"One thing more you shall decide," he said. "The train starts this afternoon at the very hour when I ought to be—you know where. Shall I delay my journey—just for one day?"

"Not for an hour!" Silence answered, almost passionately. "Remember, you never can have but one mother. Go to her at once!"

And so he went, without another word, scarcely another look; he dared not trust himself to either. Another minute, and he should have snatched the girl in his arms, forgetting the dead mother close by, or the living presence of Sophie Reynier, who just then entered—forgetting everything in the wide world except that he *must* have her, must shelter her in his bosom, and tell her that there was her one home for ever, that he would die for her—or, better still, live for her—the only woman in the world who could make life worth having. Frantic—impetuous vow! made by how many lovers, and kept by how few!

But it was not made now. The two or three minutes he stayed were occupied in explaining to Sophie Reynier about the telegram, his mother's illness, his compelled journey, and his certain return as soon as possible.

"You will say all this to M. Reynier? And I shall find *her* with you when I come back?"

"Certainly. Yes."

"You will take care of her?"

"I will."

He looked at kind Sophie. There was the tender light of her love for her own good young pasteur shining in her eyes. "Thank you!" Roderick took her hand and kissed it, and was gone.

Gone—without the slightest explanation or promise on either side. Still he did not feel unsatisfied. Though he left her free, he was himself bound. It is not troth-

plight that creates love. Often the pledges kept longest and faithfullest are those which were never made.

No actual confession had he won—it could not be. But her little cold hand had clung to his a moment, and she had uttered, unhesitatingly, her soft, firm “Yes,” implying that trust which is a man’s best pride, a woman’s safest refuge—for love without trust is a broken reed.

Above all, she had bidden him go, had helped him to do his duty. Roderick remembered once hearing his father say that the deepest tenderness a woman can show to a man is to help him to do his duty. Though he was going away, going far out of sight of her sweet presence into what seemed a lonely wilderness of a world—Roderick was not unhappy.

He had no time for much thinking about himself—trains wait for no man—and there were a good many preparations for his sudden quitting of the dear little town which had grown quite home-like to him. Even the honest garçon at the hotel looked triste at the departure of “ce monsieur anglais,” who had always been so pleasant and kind to everybody, and felt a certain consolation, which, indeed, Roderick himself shared, as if it were a sort of paction with Providence, when he had decided only to pack his valise, leaving the best part of his luggage behind him.

Thus independent of “bagage” he could easier rush from station to station—so as not to lose a moment on his journey home; for he had determined not to stop, either for sleep or food, if he could help it, till he found himself at Richerden.

Those plaintive words, “You never can have but one mother,” seemed continually to ring in his ears, rousing him to all his forgotten duties, his dormant affections. He had never felt himself so much her son as now, when he was about to bring to his mother a new daughter.

And such a daughter! “Soon, soon they will all

feel how good she is ; how she will help me to be good. My darling ! my only darling ! ”

And as, all in the rainy dark, he whirled through the Val de Travers, watching dreamily the black outlines of the ravine which he had passed in midday sunshine such a little while ago—yet it seemed half a lifetime—and thought of her, sitting in the empty house, the poor motherless child ! his whole heart melted over her—that full, tender, manly heart out of which the lonely self-absorption—only that, not selfishness—and the restless yearning, had alike slipped away. It was not merely that he had found

“ His spirit’s mate, compassionate and wise,”

every man in love finds this, or fancies he has found it ; but some divine instinct told him he had also found a helpmeet—a creature not only to love, but to believe in—not only to cherish, but to rest upon ; the sort of woman of whom it is said, “ The heart of her husband may safely trust in her : she will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life.”

There are women the love of whom, and their love, given or returned, is a curse to any man ; but when Roderick, having sat wakeful all night, endlessly thinking, just before dawn dropped into a fitful, brief sleep, the last word he murmured to himself was, “ My blessing, my blessing ! ” It was true.

Catching the morning mail from Paris, he reached London the same night. His twenty-four hours’ journey made him feel excessively tired ; for though perfectly healthy he had not the robustness of some at his age—would always be the sort of man who is the better for a woman’s quiet, watchful care in small things. Strong emotion especially always took the life out of him in a painful way, till he was half ashamed of feeling so ill for nothing. Catching sight of himself in an hotel mirror he quite started.

“ She would think I looked like a ghost.”

And the new delicious sensation—of the duty of taking care of one's self, of regarding "even wretched meat and drink," if one be "dear to some one else"—came upon him till he actually blushed, like a girl admiring her own beauty because it is pleasant in other eyes—and—ordered his supper!

The temptation was strong to go to bed and sleep; he was so very tired, and the London hotel was so quiet and comfortable; besides, it was rather pleasant to hear his native tongue about him once more. But no; *she* had bidden him not to delay an hour; and every hour, as he drew nearer home, his sensitive temperament shrank with a vague dread from some sort of formless evil that might be awaiting him there. And in his secret heart Roderick a little shrank from pain.

"I am not half as brave as she," he thought. "I should have to go through life 'with all my nerves outside,' as I once heard somebody say, if I had not her to help me. But I shall have her, thank God! Only a brief time—as brief as I can make it—and I will have you, my darling!"

Meantime he did as he knew Silence would have wished him to do—gathered up all his strength of body and mind, and took the night mail to Richerden.

He got there about four in the morning—a thorough Richerden morning, or rather night, of sleet and snow and blinding rain. Entirely worn out with fatigue, he came at last to his mother's door.

For the moment he hardly believed it was his mother's, but that he must have made some egregious mistake. For the house was all lighted up, carriages were going and coming, daintily muffled figures filled the entrance-hall—it was evidently the breaking up of some festive entertainment.

He had pictured to himself the silent house—the night of anxious vigil over sickness—death; for even that last terror had, as he neared home, forced itself

upon his weakened nerves. Instead, he came in at the end of a ball !

"My mother—how is my mother?" were the first words that passed his lips—they had been knelling themselves into his tired brain for the last hundred miles.

There she was, standing half-way up the staircase, in her ruby velvet, point lace, and all ablaze with diamonds—a little tired and old-looking, as was natural at four in the morning, but beaming with health, good-nature, and the exuberant enjoyment of life.

What a contrast to the dead mother whom he had left in her coffin so many hundred miles away !

Waiting for a pause in the stream of guests, Roderick hid himself behind the shadow of the door, till Mrs. Jardine's voice, loud and hearty, had repeated a series of hospitable adieus. Thence he emerged, a somewhat forlorn figure, into the brilliant glare of light.

"Goodness me, Rody ! is that you, my dearest boy ? Girls, your brother is here."

She wrapped him in a voluminous embrace, and kissed him many times with true maternal warmth.

"Mother, you have not been ill ? There is nothing wrong with you ?"

"No, my darling ; what should there be ? Oh ! I remember—the telegram."

A sudden cloud came over her face, which was repeated with added shadow on her son's.

"Yes, the telegram. I thought you were ill, and I came home, as you bade me, immediately. Never mind. Good night."

"Stop, my dear. Just stop."

But he would not ; and went straight upstairs to his own room.

CHAPTER X.

BLUID NOT THICKER THAN WATER.

RODERICK did not appear among his family until the next day, or rather the same day, for it was five in the morning before the last guest departed, and the household sank into quietness. Then Bella Jardine, knocking at his door, had been greeted with a fraternal growl; and the trayful of food which, according to the family faith that the way to the heart is through the stomach, she brought up to him, was left untasted on the door-mat.

"Let me alone; I will see you all at breakfast," were the only words that could be got out of him. Angry, sorrowful, and utterly worn out in body as well as mind, he threw himself on the bed, in the cold, fireless room—evidently he had not been expected so soon—rolled himself up in a bearskin rug which he had bought at Neuchâtel, in planning that never-to-be-forgotten day at Lausanne, and slept for many hours. Slept so heavily that when he awoke, long after mid-day, he was surprised to find his fire lit, and a dainty little breakfast standing beside it; also his feet, stretching outside the rug, were carefully wrapped up in one of his mother's shawls.

She had been in his room, then! making him "comfortable," as it was her habit to do, as much as she could—perhaps giving him, unfelt, the kiss that he might not have cared for, the tear which would only have vexed him. Poor mother! And he was her own, her only son.

Roderick was touched. When he came downstairs the first thing he did was to look for her all over the house, and when they met he kissed her affectionately.

"Forgive my being so rude as to go to bed at once ; but I was very tired. And you ? You have been up, spite of your fatigues, and looking after me as usual ? I did so enjoy my nice breakfast ! Thank you, mother."

He kissed her again, and then sat down, not knowing what else to say. Would she speak first, or must he, on the subject which never left his mind for a moment ?

"Yes, you were quite wearied out with your long journey, my dear boy," said Mrs. Jardine. "You must have travelled night and day, to have got back so soon."

"Could I do otherwise, thinking you were ill, mother ? and naturally I was somewhat astonished—"

"To find us in the middle of a ball ?" broke in Bella, who sat surrounded by a heap of wedding finery. "It must have been a little perplexing. But we thought that frightening telegram was the best way to bring you home."

Roderick drew back, flushing angrily.

"Hold your tongue, Bella," said the mother. "But, my dear Rody, I never said I was ill ; I only said I was 'not well,' which was quite true. How could it be otherwise, after your letter ?"

"You did get my letter, then—my two letters ?"

"Yes, both." And there ensued an awkward silence.

Proud, shy, reserved as his nature was, to feel that he had been cheated in this way, treated like a silly school-boy, when his heart was bursting with the strongest passion of manhood, was to Roderick a very severe trial of temper and patience. He stood facing his mother and sister, expecting them to explain, to apologize. But they did neither ; they said nothing, only went on with their occupation, talking together, just as if there was nobody in the room beside themselves.

Possibly this was half pretence, to hide their secret

fright, poor women! at what they had done, or were going to do. Perhaps something in the look of the young man warned them that he was a young man, would never be a boy again, not even to his mother. To all parents and all children there does come such a moment, when the Rubicon, once crossed, can be re-crossed no more.

Bella tried to tide over the difficult moment, the *instans tyrannus*, which governs fatally so many a life, by taking it lightly, and calling her brother's attention to her millinery, her wreath and veil, to be worn in full splendour three days hence.

"Such things are quite out of my line, thank you," said Roderick, coldly. "Mother, I should like to have a little talk with you; but, if you are too much occupied, I—I can wait."

"Oh! yes, wait. There is plenty of time, plenty of time, my dear boy," said Mrs. Jardine, hurriedly, though with an air of exceeding relief, as she turned back to Bella and her "braws."

The critical moment passed, seized, unhappily, by neither side, for Roderick, excessively irritated, walked instantly out of the room, and out of the house.

For an hour or more he paced the streets—the miserable, muddy Richerden streets, which seemed more miserable than ever now, after the bright "backs of colleges" at Cambridge, and the dear little town of Neuchâtel, where it seemed as if there was always sunshine. He was boiling over with indignation and pain. A storm was coming; he felt it looming in the family atmosphere.

His mother evidently had not taken kindly to the idea of his marriage; there would be a battle to fight. Even if no actual opposition—which he was loath to fear—there was a total lack of sympathy with him; else how could his mother—any mother—being acquainted with all the facts of the case, knowing that her son loved a girl as his very life, yet had left her,

with her own mother lying dead, to rush frantically home, how could she greet him without a word of inquiry, or the slightest show of interest in his affairs, except the chilling remark, "There was no hurry."

"But there is, there shall be. She must hear me; she cannot help it. If she has a heart in her bosom, she will feel for me," he thought passionately.

Yet when, a few minutes after, he caught sight of her and Bella driving past in their splendid carriage and pair, laughing together so much that they did not even see him at first, Roderick took off his hat to them, his own mother and sister, as distantly as if they had been complete strangers, and turned round a bye-street in indignant disdain.

For, indeed, at the moment they felt like strangers, as far removed as the poles from himself, and from that forlorn girl the image of whom he carried perpetually in his fancy. He saw her flitting along the streets of Neuchâtel in her grey dress and waterproof cloak, her plain black hat with the pretty fair hair curling beneath it; he clasped the vision to his sick, empty heart, feeling that she was nearer to him than any of his own belongings—nearer and dearer than anything in the wide world.

It was so; it could not but be, for it was the natural law of things. "A man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife," thought Roderick, bracing himself up against the worst, for his imaginative temperament was always prone to leap at once to the very worst, though his innate courage taught him also to face it.

And now he felt glad that he had come back, nominally as free as he went, that no word of mutual confession had passed between him and the object of his love; he did not even know whether she would consent to marry him. Nothing, therefore, could possibly be said against her; upon him only would fall the vials of maternal wrath—if wrath it were, which

he could hardly bring himself to believe. It seemed so impossible, so supremely ridiculous, that a young man who could well afford to marry, whom his relations were always urging to marry, should not be left to choose for himself, especially when choosing such a wife as Silence Jardine.

He murmured over and over again to himself her dear name, not in its French form, as he was accustomed to hear it, though that sounded very sweet, but sweeter still was the English word which she would henceforth be known by—a familiar name, too, in the old family home.

“Oh, father, father! you, at least, would not have blamed me; you would have been glad that I should bring to Blackhall another Silence Jardine.”

The thought calmed and comforted him; he felt less angry with his mother; he determined that he would have an explanation with her—a quiet, pacific, filial explanation—that very night.

But it is astonishing how long clever people—and she was a decidedly clever woman in her way, was Mrs. Jardine—can shirk a difficulty, or avoid an unpleasant thing.

He hardly knew how it came about, but Roderick had actually been two whole days at home, taking his place at the foot of his mother’s sumptuous table, and entertaining, with gentle courtesy and well-disguised weariness, her endless guests, falling back into old ways so completely that he sometimes asked himself if the last two months were not merely a morning dream; yet not a syllable had been breathed of his intended marriage or of Mademoiselle Jardine.

Did they think he had forgotten her? Did his mother believe that? or Bella, with her lover paying devoted court to her, in the few short days that would elapse before he dropped into the common-place husband? A regular Richerden husband Roderick was sure he would turn out to be, and Bella a proper

Richerden wife, dressing and dining, paying calls and interchanging gossip, vying in domestic splendour with her two sisters, and getting as much as she could out of her wealthy mother, even though she had married a rich man—had made, as Mrs. Jardine continually declared, the “best” marriage of all the family.

“And mine will be the ‘worst,’ of course,” thought Roderick.

His smile would have been a sneer had he not remembered *her*—the innocent girlish girl, scarcely yet a woman, before whose pure, true eyes all shams crumbled down into their natural dust, all contemptible worldlinesses fled away like ugly ghosts before the dawning light; all about her was so intensely real, so simple and directly in earnest, that in her presence nothing false could possibly live—at least for long.

“She will never do here,” he felt sure, when, after forty-eight hours of Richerden life, the contrast between that and all he had left behind forced itself upon him with an almost exaggerated strength. “I must contrive, somehow, to migrate to Blackhall.”

And doubtful as it all was still, though he was but telling his mother the absolute truth in saying he did not know whether or not Mademoiselle Jardine would accept him, still, with the strong will of an honest man, he hugged to his heart the delicious thought, “*I will* have her. I love her, and I will make her love me. And if she loves me, no earthly power shall ever put us asunder.”

The absolute necessity which almost every good man feels, not merely of a pretty girl to flirt with, a poetic mistress to adore, but of a wife—bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, while at the same time she is soul of his soul, his help, his comfort, his delight—had begun to cry out in this young man’s heart with a sense of gnawing want which he felt nothing external would ever now appease.

"I must have her," he repeated to himself. "I want her, I want her!"

He glanced round the glittering room. His mother had a dinner-party that night, and a small "carpet-dance" afterwards, at which were collected half the pretty girls of Richerden, with whom he had to dance by turns. But Roderick felt that he did not care two straws for any one of them, compared with that poor little girl sitting alone, in her black gown, with her pale cheeks and dim eyes, in the tiny salon that overlooked the silent lake of Neuchâtel.

CHAPTER XI.

A RIGHTEOUS WAR.

It was not till the third day after his return, which, being the day before the wedding, was of necessity kept free from visitors, that Roderick succeeded in finding his mother alone.

Coming into her "boudoir," as she called it, the little room off the drawing-room, which she made her place of refuge when she was not in sufficiently grand toilette for visitors, he saw her sitting there, for "five quiet minutes." Not unwilling; for there was a tired look on her face which betrayed that she was scarcely a young woman now, though her energy and vitality carried her through so much; while her easy temper and perfect health had hitherto warded off any "crow's-feet" that might have been expected to appear on her still comely countenance. Still she looked a little the worse for wear, and very weary.

"Mother, you ought to rest; you will be ill, if you don't," said her son, going up to her with honest anxiety.

"I'll rest by-and-by," she answered, "when to-morrow is over. Oh, these weddings! these weddings! It's all very well for the young folks; but—the parents! However, this is the last one. I have no more girls to marry."

"No, mother," said Roderick, sitting down by her, both out of real tenderness and because he felt that now was the golden moment which must not be let pass by—for there was a kind look in her eyes and a tremor in her voice, such as had not greeted him ever since he came home; "no, mother, your daughters are all safely disposed of. And when your son marries, he will faithfully promise that his wedding shall give you no trouble."

Mrs. Jardine drew back, then looked at the door, as if feeling herself caught in the toils and anxious to escape; but Roderick held her hand fast; ay, he put his arm round her waist in a tender, filial way; he was determined to "have it out," as people say, with her; but he wished all to be done in the gentlest and most kindly fashion.

"Yes, mother, as I told you, there will, I trust, be another marriage in the family; but——"

"But not yet. Not for a very long time. I couldn't stand it—indeed, I could not. Don't let us talk about that. I am very busy, you see."

"Nay, mother, we must talk about it. I have been waiting to speak to you ever since I came home. You are the first and only person I can speak to on this subject. You must feel that."

"Feel what? Speak about what? Let me go. I declare I don't know what you are driving at, and I can't put up with any nonsense—not just now."

Roderick turned pale with anger, but he controlled himself.

"It is not nonsense ; I explained all in my letter—in my two letters—which you say you received."

"What, all about the little Swiss girl who you fancy is your cousin ?"

"She is my cousin, there is no doubt of that ; at least, remotely so ; not near enough to warrant the slightest objection, which I know you have to cousins marrying."

"Marrying ! tut, tut, laddie ; who spoke of marrying ? Put such folly out of your head at once. Never let me hear of it again—or of her."

"Never hear of her again !" said Roderick, slowly, though his heart was burning with indignation, and the nervous trembling, which he always felt in moments of excitement, seemed to run through his whole frame. "Mother, you misunderstand the matter. You must hear of her. She is the lady whom I have chosen for my wife—if I can get her—my wife and your daughter-in-law."

"Goodness gracious me ! You haven't made her an offer ? You said you would not till you heard from me."

"And I have done as I said, mother. I came away without having made any declaration of love to her, without having even found out whether or not she loves me. Though I consider myself bound, she is perfectly free."

"Then let her remain so," answered Mrs. Jardine, rising up with a look of great relief. "Well, Rody, my dear, I'm glad it's no worse. All young men have these 'smites'—ever so many, sometimes, before they settle down and marry. The best thing to be done is to run away, which you did. Now you will stay beside me, like a good son, all the winter. A very merry winter we shall likely have, on account of Bella's marriage. You will be going out a great deal, and will soon get over it."

"Get over it !" repeated Roderick, as he stood

opposite to his mother, very quiet, but with gleaming eyes, and a cheek in which the old Highland blood kept flashing and paling. "Get over what, mother?"

"This—this infatuation for the—the young person abroad."

"The young lady. You forget she is a Jardine."

"Is she? But she has got no money. She is a governess, or something of the sort?"

"She has not got a halfpenny in the world, and she earns her daily bread as a music-teacher," said Roderick, flinging the facts out in a sort of proud defiance. "Nevertheless, she is a perfect gentlewoman, and the dearest and noblest woman I ever met. If I can ever win her as mine, Providence will have been only too kind to me. As for myself, I feel I am hardly good enough to tie her shoes."

"Oh, nonsense! every lad says that," cried the mother, with an involuntary glance of ill-disguised maternal pride. "And most lads make fools of themselves with some girl or other, and cause no end of bothers to their families, yet turn out douce, decent married men after all."

"As I hope to do, mother," said Roderick, striving hard to keep his temper. "You know you have always wished me to get married, and now I am going to do it—that is all. Only, I wish to pay you the respect of telling you first. So, the day after to-morrow, I shall go back to Neuchâtel, and make my offer immediately."

Mrs. Jardine, who was just escaping from the room, turned round.

"You don't mean to tell me this to my very face?"

"Better tell you to your face than do it behind your back, as many sons might have done. But I am not a coward. What I do I am not ashamed to do openly, before you and all the world."

"The world!—oh! what will the world say?" cried the poor woman, in genuine despair. "And you, who

I thought would make such an excellent marriage, with all your father's good looks and twice his cleverness—he was not clever, dear man!—and then he was always so very peculiar. But you—oh, Rody, my son, my son!”

And she mourned over him, even as David mourned over Absalom, till Roderick hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

“Come, mother,” he said at last, coaxingly—he knew she loved him, and was amenable to affection even more than to reason. “Don't let us quarrel. Every mother must have her son bringing her a daughter home some time; and if you only knew how sweet a daughter I hope to bring home to you. Not that she is pretty exactly, or perhaps you would not call her so.”

“Not pretty—and no money—and a mere governess or something! Why, Rody, you must be mad—stark staring mad! I never will consent to it, never, as long as I live.”

And Mrs. Jardine sat down on the sofa again, with a heavy flop. She was becoming strongly excited.

Then her son, in whom passion always culminated in a white heat, making him totally silent, sat down opposite to her, closing his lips firmly, determined that whatever he had to hear should not force from him, if he could help, one single violent or disrespectful word.

It was a very great trial, for Mrs. Jardine was one of the women who talk—who cannot be prevented from talking. Not that she was a foolish woman—quite the contrary; what she said was often very good and to the point, only she said it too many times over. She argued in a circle, and came back exactly to where she started. Besides, she had the quality—good or bad according as it is used—of seeing a thing on half-a-dozen sides, till she almost forgot what was the original side on which she had beheld it. And then she overlapped plain facts in such a cloud of rhetoric, and had

the power "to make the worse appear the better reason" in such an energetic way, that a "talk" with Mrs. Jardine was no easy matter, especially as she always expected to have two-thirds of the talk to herself.

As she certainly had now, Roderick listening with as much patience as he could muster to her arguments—all drawn from the outside, from the experience and example of various of their mutual friends, and from conjectures as to what would be the opinion of various other friends, when the matter became known at large in Richerden society.

"You see, my dear boy, this is not an uncommon occurrence, when a young man is well off, and a girl is poor and wants to get married. Look at Andrew Patteson, for instance, who took a fancy to his sister's governess, and a pretty marriage it turned out to be, bringing upon the poor fellow about twelve brothers and sisters to maintain—grocers, too, or bakers or something. And then that dreadful business of James Macfarlane, who got into such a disreputable entanglement with his mother's table-maid. Though that was not quite so bad for poor Mrs. Macfarlane, as I never heard of James's wishing to marry the table-maid."

"Good God!" cried Roderick, starting up, his honest young cheek flushing all over. "Mother, do you know what you are saying?"

Smitten to the heart—for at heart she was a good woman—Mrs. Jardine drew back, and her matron cheek also grew a shade redder.

"No, my dear, of course I did not mean that. James Macfarlane was severely to be blamed. And, thank God, you are quite different from him. You will never disgrace either yourself or me. But I don't want you to make a fool of yourself either. I could not bear all Richerden to say that my son had thrown himself away upon a girl whom nobody knew, who was not even pretty, who in all probability just married him for his money."

This was a clever home-thrust, but it failed. Roderick, excited as he was, burst into a fit of sudden laughter.

"Marry me for my money! Well, that is a good joke! I assure you I have taken the greatest pains to conceal that I had any money at all. Neither she nor her mother has had the slightest idea that I am any better off than themselves."

Mrs. Jardine opened her eyes in undisguised astonishment. "Bless me!" she said, or rather muttered to herself, "what fools they must have been!"

Roderick tried not to hear, nor to answer, but in vain. Still he paused a minute before he allowed himself to speak, and then it was in that cold, quiet voice which implied so much; the sad self-control which the old are accustomed to use, but which is rather pathetic in the young. Only so much was at stake, and all he did was done for her. He would have borne to be "cut in little pieces," as people say, rather than that a finger's weight of blame or harm should fall on the woman he loved.

"Mother, I assure you Madame Jardine was not a fool; she was a highly cultivated, sensible, and prudent woman. And her 'folly,' if you call it so, in esteeming me for myself, and not for my outside advantages, was, to say the least, rather complimentary to me. She liked me, I know that; and now she is dead I think of her with gratitude and tenderness."

"More than you do of your own mother, I dare say," said the poor woman, with an accent of not unnatural bitterness, till her son rose up, put his two hands on her shoulders, and regarded her with his honest, affectionate eyes.

"You can't look in my face, mother, and tell me that. You know you cannot."

And then she dropped on his neck, and kissed him, and cried—

"But you shouldn't have done this, Rody, my boy.

It's very hard for a mother. Oh, my dear, I was sair left to myself when I let you go abroad."

Despite his vexation, Roderick could hardly help smiling.

"But, mother, you could not tie me to your apron-string for ever. I must some day go out into the world and find myself a wife. You ought to be glad that I have found one—if I do get her—the very sweetest that ever a man could get."

"How can I be sure of that? I don't know her."

"But I want you to know her. Don't misjudge her; only see her."

"Never!" said Mrs. Jardine, her natural strong will and love of power uprising to the rescue of her temporary softness.

Besides that paramount dread, "What will people say?" very potent with a woman like her, "content to dwell in decencies for ever," and always afraid of compromising her newly-won position by doing something "odd" and unlike her neighbours, there was the lurking irritation that in the most important step of his life her son had acted without her knowledge, advice, or consent.

Perhaps few are conscious to what an extent this motive rules human actions, at least with certain natures. It is not so much the thing done which is objectionable, as that it is done without reference to themselves. In marriages especially, the parental egoism, only too common, which takes for granted that fathers and mothers must know best, whether or not they have the slightest means of knowing either the circumstances or the individual, is a source of endless misery on both sides.

"Never!" cried Mrs. Jardine again. "You had better give the thing up, Roderick, for I will have nothing whatever to do with it, or with her."

"Very well," answered Roderick, and in his voice was a deadly quietness. "Now we know exactly where

we stand. Mother, you are busy, you say, and I have also an engagement. Good morning."

"But you will be back to dinner?"

He paused a moment, and then answered, "Certainly."

"And you are not forgetting that to-morrow is the wedding-day?"

"I trust I am not in the habit of forgetting any of my duties."

She looked after him as he quitted the room, passing Bella, who just then entered, without word or look—indeed, he seemed to walk blindly, like a person half stunned; and her mind misgave her a little.

"I hope I haven't vexed the poor lad too much," said she, in repeating the conversation to Bella, who listened with only half an ear, being entirely absorbed in her own affairs. "But really it did seem such nonsense, and he only five-and-twenty. How can he possibly know his own mind?"

"Yes," answered Bella, carelessly, "it would be a great mistake to take the matter too earnestly, or to make any fuss about it. Let him alone, and he will soon get over it. I hope he understood all about the bridesmaids' bouquets and lockets for to-morrow?"

"Oh! he will be sure to do all we want. He never forgets anything. He was always such a thoughtful, considerate boy, poor Rody! However, as you say, he will soon get over it," added the mother, sighing, and trying to make herself believe exactly as she wished and willed.

True, her son was only five-and-twenty; and at that age ninety-nine out of a hundred young men would certainly have "got over it." But he happened to be the hundredth and exceptional one. Possibly, under different circumstances, there might have befallen him the lot of most dreamers—

In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of this idol of my thought,"

who is, alas ! not seldom

"Too early seen unknown, and known too late ;"

but fate had been very merciful to his sheltered youth. He had never found any one to idealize into his perfect woman, until now : and having found her, not "too late," but early enough to consecrate her as his whole life's blessing, he had strength enough, young as he was, to seize that blessing and hold it fast.

"I will hold her fast," he said to himself, in an outburst of sudden passion, which, however, was not yielded to till he found himself out of the house—out of the town—and tearing at a rapid pace along the solitary road. "No power on earth shall take her from me."

And he clenched his hands and set his teeth. Like a frantic boy, it was a relief to have some physical outlet for his suffering ; nay, at last, having walked several miles, almost without knowing it, overcome with bodily fatigue and mental pain, he sat down on a dyke-side, let his head drop between his hands, and sobbed outright like a child.

However, very soon manliness and courage returned—as well as the undying hope which is born with all first love, when it is strong and true. His mother must come round : it was ridiculous to suppose she should not. Of course she was vexed at first—well, perhaps it was a little his own fault : he ought not to have startled her by such sudden candour, but prepared her, in some diplomatic way. Only he hated diplomacy : he felt a certain scorn, mingled with pity, for any persons with whom it is necessary to diplomatize.

"I must take the direct course, and trust Heaven for the rest," thought he. And, looking at his watch, he found it was so late that only by a steady pace homewards could he get back in time for dinner. For

he had no idea of shirking that respectable meal, or of frightening his mother by his mysterious absence. That folly of weak and self-conceited people—the doing of things “for spite,” or to punish other people, never entered his strong, straightforward, simple mind.

Besides, after the first shock, his hopeful, ardent youth refused to accept the worst. That his mother’s fatal “never” should drop like a pall over his whole future life—over two lives! It could not be: it must not be. She was a good woman, a loving mother; and though it was her temperament sometimes to view things in an exaggerated light, still, if met quietly, patiently—ah! he remembered well how infinite his father’s patience had been!—she gradually came round.

“Oh! that he was alive now, my dear, dear father! He would understand me; he was a young man once. I wonder if——”

And that story, never told, which one, or both, of those concerned had died without telling, flitted faintly across Roderick’s mind. Still it was but an old story, all gone by now; and his story was so lifelike, new, and young. All young people believe that never was there any passion so deep, any faithfulness so perfect, any suffering so keen, as their own. No wonder Roderick’s thoughts soon drifted back from the dead past to the living present, and he wearied himself with troubled conjectures as to what his mother would do next; and, if so, what he must do next, till he came to the conclusion that the best thing would be to do nothing till after Bella’s marriage.

So, returning home, he took his place there as if nothing were amiss; helped his mother and Bella as much as he could in the endless “last things” which required to be seen to; and finally made them both laugh by giving vent to the heterodox remark, “that a wedding was almost as bad as a funeral.”

“That speech did not look very like a young man in love,” observed Bella, confidentially to her mother.

“Depend upon it, he will soon get over it—they all do. Still I wonder what sort of girl she is, and if they are really so very fond of one another. Poor fellow!”

And perhaps there flashed upon the bride’s mental eyes some momentary vision of a never attained, never sought to be attained Paradise, quite different from the one she was deliberately entering; a Paradise, not of wise, worldly men, or idle and luxurious women, but only of innocent “fools.” She sighed, in the midst of her laughter, gathered up her wreath and veil in one hand, and her Brussels lace pocket-handkerchief in the other, and disappeared up the stairs.

And on the stairs it was, in full view of the family, that Roderick bade his mother good night. She did not speak, nor he; for he knew that their next conversation must be the turning-point, the crisis in more than one destiny.

CHAPTER XII.

A THUNDERSTORM.

THE wedding-day came and passed. It was not a day of sentimental emotion: the principal consciousness which it brought to Roderick was that there were certain inevitable things to do and say, which he did and said to the best of his ability; thinking the while that his wedding-day, did it ever come, should be as unlike this day as possible.

So Bella Jardine and her new “gude-man,” if such a vulgar word could be used of Mr. Alexander Thomson without scandalizing himself and his family, were floated away into felicity, while the hundred or more particular friends who had been invited to see them

“turned off,” as the young lady with whom Roderick had to open the ball expressed it, danced till far into the “sma’ hours” with spirit and enthusiasm. In fact, no marriage could have gone off with greater “aclaw,” as Mrs. Jardine declared, and she was right; her own indomitable energy, good temper, and good spirits contributing in no small degree to that desirable result.

But with all these excellent qualities, one flag sometimes at nearly sixty; and during the following day, anxiously as Roderick sought a chance of speaking to his mother, she was, either intentionally or unintentionally, wholly invisible. Not till after dinner—nay, nearly bedtime, did the mother and son come really face to face, sitting alone together in the large, silent drawing-room, which looked especially dreary; so much so that Mrs. Jardine, saying something about “going to bed early,” rang for the servants, and conducted, it seemed with more lengthiness than usual, the never-omitted family prayers.

These over, mother and son were again alone.

Alas! there are worse things than sorrow—worse things, God pity us! than even death. Roderick thought involuntarily of that other mother and child; the poor girl arranging the flowers he had brought upon the dear, dead bosom, where she had rested all her life, in utmost sympathy of feeling, most perfect and unbroken tenderness, and there smote him, almost like a blow, the bitter fact that kindred blood and external bonds do not constitute internal union. How was he to make his mother understand, in the smallest degree, what he felt, what he desired? That great gulf, which opens sometimes between brother and sister, parent and child—even between husband and wife, though it would have been hard to make him believe that, poor fellow!—had opened—nay, had long been open—between this mother and son. It was neither’s fault, but it was there.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Jardine, with a rather impressive yawn, "I suppose we had better go to bed."

"Not just this minute, mother," entreated Roderick. "Let me have half-a-dozen words with you, if you are not too tired. Remember, I start to-morrow for Neuchâtel."

"Neuchâtel!—to-morrow! What in the world do you mean?"

"I told you that, immediately after the wedding, I meant to go back to Switzerland."

"Why? What for?"

Roderick paused a moment. "To see Mademoiselle Jardine, and ask her to become my wife. She is alone and unprotected, and, if she does me the honour to accept me, I think it will be best to arrange our marriage with as little delay as possible."

He said this in as quiet and matter-of-fact a way as he could: perhaps this very quietness only excited his mother the more. She started up, her florid face literally scarlet.

"Are you mad? How dare you stand there and deliberately tell me such a thing!"

"I merely repeat what I have before told you, both in my letters and when we were talking together the other day. You were not particularly kind to me then, but I thought you were busy and worried, and that you hardly took the matter in."

"I did not—I couldn't believe any son of mine would be such—such a downright fool!"

"Well, granted that I am a fool, or you think so," returned he, still speaking quietly under the tight rein which he had resolved to put upon himself. "But I myself think I could not have done a wiser thing. So would you, if you only saw *her*. Will you see her?" And with a sudden impulse he threw himself, like a boy, at his mother's knees. "If I bring her to you at once, poor motherless girl that she is! will you

receive her and be a mother to her? She would be like a daughter unto you."

"Thank you. What, she would get married, and she in deep mournings! Or else come here without being married, with you as her travelling companion! A nice sort of young lady she must be, that such an idea could ever enter her head—or yours!"

Roderick could have knocked his own head against the wall in utter vexation.

"You are right, mother, I am a fool. Of course she would never consent to either plan. But there is a medium course. If we were once engaged, which abroad is a tie almost as binding and as public as marriage, she could come, under escort of some friend—Madame Reynier, perhaps—and stay with you until her mourning is over and we could be married."

"All very fine! But what would your sisters say? What would our friends say? That I had taken a foreign girl—a girl without a halfpenny, and a governess besides—who had been foisted upon me against my will; taken her and kept her in my house—me, a respectable woman—till I could make her my son's wife. Why, all Richerden would laugh at me! They would say I had gone clean daft; that, instead of helping on such a marriage, I ought to have set my face against it—prevented it."

"How?" said Roderick, with an ominous flash of the eye. But again he controlled himself. Open contest—that terrible internecine war which families, like nations, should defer to the last limit of possible endurance—was a thing from which his tender and sensitive nature shrank inexpressibly. He could only live in an atmosphere of peace.

"Mother," he said, "do not be hard and unjust to me."

"Unjust! Was I ever unjust to you? Have I not been the best, the kindest, the most good-natured mother alive? Have you not always had your own way in everything?"

"That is true, mother," he said, with a sigh. "Perhaps it would have been all the better for me if I had not 'had my own way in everything.' But now, when it is an honest way—a right way—oh, if you only saw her! How could I help loving her? Nobody could. And I must have married some time, you know."

"But not now: not when I am left quite alone, all the rest gone. Oh, what trials we poor mothers have to bear!"

"I did not suppose Bella's marriage was a trial. You always seemed delighted at it."

"So I was; so I am. But then it was a respectable marriage. Everybody knew all about it. If you, now, had chosen a nice Richerden girl, with some money perhaps—you'll not have much of your own, not till I'm dead, laddie; and even then I may do as I like with my own, I suppose. Take care!"

And she shrewdly glanced aside at him, watching the effect of this chance arrow. But it fell pointless; Roderick was too simple to take the matter in. All his life pounds, shillings, and pence had been the farthest from his thought; he had always had enough for his own wants—never very great, for he was not personally luxurious; beyond that he wasted no thought as to how large his income was, or in what it consisted. He left all these things to his mother, whom he used laughingly to call, as his father had done, the best "man of business" in the family.

"But, mother," he answered, calmly passing over all else, "I did not wish a Richerden girl, and I don't care for money; you know that. I prefer a quiet life, in the country if possible."

"What! would you forsake me entirely? I couldn't have believed it of you! O Rody, my boy, my only son!"

She may have been exaggerating her feelings a little, in order to work upon his: still there was a ring of

natural pathos in her voice which took the poor fellow by storm.

“Mother dearest!” he sat down by her and affectionately clasped her hand, “who talks of forsaking? Not I, certainly. You are not going to lose your son but only to gain another daughter—and such a daughter! If you only once saw her! Will you see her? Will you come back with me to Switzerland and let us fetch her home together?”

He was not wise, not tactful, certainly, this poor Roderick. Alas! a large nature, judging a smaller one, often makes egregious mistakes.

Mrs. Jardine drew herself up with indignant pride and outraged decorum.

“Well, I do think that is the coolest and most impudent proposal——”

“Impudent!” (She had pronounced it “impident,” poor woman! which made it a still more obnoxious word.) Roderick looked his mother full in the face. Though she was his mother, he was a Jardine, and she was not; wrath sat better on him than on her; because, if hereditary blood teaches nothing more, it usually teaches that self-restraint which we are accustomed to call good breeding. “Impudence, I think, has never been a vice of our family; and the lady I have chosen, being of that family, deserves entire respect—which I shall exact for her from everybody, including my own mother. Also, excuse me, I shall resent any insult offered to her, even if offered by my own relations, exactly as if it had been an insult to myself.”

He spoke so quietly, and with such stately courtesy, the steel armour of perfect politeness, that Mrs. Jardine was frightened. The boy was his father’s own son, only with stronger health, a firmer will, a spirit unbroken, and above all the talisman of hope in his bosom—hope and love. As he stood there, he looked so handsome in his fearless youth—fearless, yet offering no obnoxious front to any one—gifted with that

best of courage, the power of self-control,—that his mother's heart misgave her a little.

“Wait till next day: we will talk it all over to-morrow. I am so tired to-night.” And she nervously took up her bed-room candle, which was waiting beside her.

Roderick lit it for her, and then kissed the hand into which he gave it.

“Dear mother, I am grieved to vex you, believe that; and I will wait a day—two or three days even—rather than go against your will. Think better of what you have said; think better of me. Do you not believe I love you?”

“It doesn't look very like it,” said she, sharply. To natures like hers, gentleness sometimes seems like a confession of weakness, and only rouses them to greater tyranny. “However, do as you say: wait a few days and I'll think over it.”

“Very well.”

The concession was given with a heavy sigh, and accepted without the slightest recognition of how much it cost. Still the storm had passed by, as so many domestic thunderstorms do, without any special bolt having fallen anywhere; and the mother and son parted with a good-night kiss in apparent friendliness, but with, oh! what a world between them! That desert world, which neither foot is able to cross to some meeting point of union, though both sides may wearily make the attempt—which always, or almost always, fails.

Life, with its perpetual growth, its constant change, brings many sad alienations, but the most hopeless of all are between those whom nature has formed in such totally diverse moulds that by no possibility can they understand one another, though they have been brought together in some close bond, which becomes at last an actual bondage. Yet it must be endured till death; and perhaps in God's good providence this inevitable

endurance is the highest form of education which He gives, or permits, to the human soul.

After his mother quitted him, Roderick pondered sadly over himself and his fortunes for a long time. Passionately in love as he was, he was not selfishly in love. He could throw himself out of himself so as to see a little on the other side. It *was* hard for his mother, who loved authority and was jealous of affection, to be dethroned in this way. And he wished—was it disloyalty to his beloved?—that things had happened differently—that she had been some one whom his mother knew and liked, rather than a complete stranger. But all that was past now. His choice was made—this or none; for, with the impulsive conviction of youth, he was quite certain that if he did not marry Silence Jardine he would never marry anybody. His mother must make up her mind to accept the inevitable.

Still he would wait; a few days did not matter so very much, with a whole lifetime of happiness before him. Surely, surely it was before him, and not a mere phantom of his own brain? Surely she, so deeply beloved, must have felt that it was so. Her sweet, firm, yet tremulous “yes” must have implied her belief in him, which a little delay would never shake, but only confirm.

He decided to write, not to her—such a thing he knew was impossible—but to M. Reynier; a brief business letter, saying that he was detained by his affairs, affairs connected with the little “inheritance” of mademoiselle his cousin, to whom he hoped to bring shortly the fullest and most satisfactory tidings. And he implored immediate tidings of her and of the kind “famille Reynier,” to whom, he added, he should ever feel himself bound by ties of the warmest gratitude. A sweet letter it was, and withal a manly, though he wrote it in his very best and politest French, almost smiling to think what his mother would have thought

of it, or of the simple, gentle, ultra-polite old man to whom it was addressed. And he went out and posted it himself, in the middle of the night, that not an hour should be lost ere it reached Neuchâtel.

Then, with an easier mind, and a heart almost happy—so strong is hope at his age—he walked back a street's length in the pelting rain, humming to himself his favourite ditty—

“Whenever she comes, she shall find me ready
To do her homage, my queen—my queen.”

CHAPTER XIII.

MOTHER AND SON AT HOME.

“WELL, mother, and when are we to have that little talk you promised me now nearly two weeks ago?”

“About what, my dear?”

“Surely you remember?”

A vexed look, passing like a shadow across the round, good-tempered face, showed that Mrs. Jardine did remember, though she would have been glad enough to pretend she did not, and to shirk the question.

“What, that entanglement of yours with the little Swiss girl? Oh, she has forgotten you by this time, depend upon it; and I was in hopes you had forgotten her.”

“That was not likely. And I must beg of you not to call it ‘an entanglement.’ What I have to speak to you about is the very serious question of my marriage. You promised to consider it. I have waited, not merely a few days, but a whole fortnight,

and you have never said a single word to me on the matter, which, you must know, is so very near my heart. It is rather hard, mother."

It was hard; and, to do the young man justice, he had behaved exceedingly well. Never sulky, never *distract*, as is the manner of young men in love, he had set his mind steadily to do his best, had been at his mother's beck and call from morning till night, had gone with her wherever she wished, and done whatever she told him to do. He had, indeed, devoted himself to her and all her whims and ways with an earnestness rather pathetic, not from selfish motives, but from a sad inward consciousness that, however this difficulty ended, he could never be as much her son as he had been; never again live in the same house, nor even in the same town, for he was determined to quit Richerden, and begin a quite different life—the unworldly, heavenly life with *her*! "My son's my son till he gets him a wife," is a law of nature, inevitable under the best circumstances, but never painless; and Roderick's tender heart was so alive to this fact that it made him especially anxious to soften things to his mother as much as he could, before the change which he felt was coming.

But now her total silence, and the silence at Neu-châtel—for Monsieur Reynier had never answered his letter—made him desperate. The more so as he was an idler at home all day, without the staff of regular business work to sustain him. Richerden life—such as is generated in most mercantile communities where wealth, suddenly earned, results in a superficial veneering of luxury, not refinement—had always been distasteful to him; now it became positively obnoxious. How he hated that perpetual "worrying" over trivial outside things, instead of the large and calm simplicity which, let levellers say what they will, is oftenest found in people of good birth and education. A duke will ride in a second-class carriage, and a duchess come

down to breakfast in a linsey gown, with a composure that would astonish your *exigeant* parvenu, who thinks his dignity compromised by anything short of the most splendid equipage, most sumptuous of eating and drinking, and most magnificent of clothes. Roderick Jardine was no duke, only a gentleman, by nature as well as birth—for nature's gentlemen are born in all classes; but somehow he always felt himself at Richerden like a fish out of water; and now it seemed as if another week of these dreary forenoons, and duller evenings, doing civility to a tableful of heavily eating, more heavily drinking men, and over-dressed, under-educated women, would nearly drive him mad.

Doubtless he judged harshly, and with the intolerance of youth. He did not see the under side of things—the anxious daily toil which inclined the men to enjoy to the uttermost their good things of this life, so hardly earned. He knew not the endless cares of the many kind and motherly hearts which beat warmly under those brilliant gowns. Just now Roderick was altogether “off the straight,” and disposed to make no allowances for anybody. He could endure, certainly; but even endurance has an end, and it had come now.

“Mother,” he said, sitting down by her and taking her hand—it was a wet afternoon, and she had just sent the carriage away—“you promised to think it over—this matter so very near my heart. Have you done so? Will you give me your approval, and let me take your love and blessing with me to—to Neuchâtel?”

“And why? What may be your business at Neuchâtel?”

He turned bitterly away. “Mother, do you think I am a stone, that you try me so? You understand quite well, though you pretend to misunderstand. You know I am going to Neuchâtel to ask Mademoiselle Jardine to marry me.”

“And then?”

A shrewd question, and pertinent; for, lover-like, man-like, he had not thought of anything that was to happen afterwards, neither his means of keeping a wife, nor the home he was to bring her to. His one idea was to secure the girl he loved for his own, to marry her, and then—*vogue la galère!* Winds and waves come to all men; no man is half a man who dares not slip anchor and face them bravely, with love in his heart and prudence at his helm. Still——

“And then?” repeated the mother.

“Then, I suppose, we shall be married.”

“Might I inquire, what do you intend to marry upon?”

This question, hard and dry, was put after a whole minute's pause, during which mother and son faced one another, and recognized, perhaps for the first time, that each had the same strong will—an inherited quality, which, like others of the kind, often make a struggle between parent and child so difficult and painful, because each is a reflection of the other. In this one only thing Roderick was liker his mother than his father. As they stood looking at one another, both felt that the contest, if contest there should arise, would not be a mere passage of arms, but actual war—war to the knife.

Roderick spoke at last, very quietly, after his habit; he was growing terribly quiet now.

“I have not considered the question of my income; but it keeps me, and is doubtless enough to keep a wife. You pay it so regularly that it is you who can best inform me its precise amount, and whence I draw it; for I should like, naturally, from this time to be as independent as possible.”

“So you shall be, never fear, and much good may your independence do you! Roderick Jardine, since you will be such a fool, hear first what you have to look to. When I married your father, except that

tumble-down place, Blackhall, he had not a halfpenny. I was daft to marry him, I know that; but I was young, and I was fond of him." Her voice trembled a little. "However, that's all past; and he was a good man, and a kind husband to me—always let me do as I liked with my own. For everything was my own, and is still, and I will do as I like with it; mind that."

"Of course; who wishes to hinder you, mother?" said Roderick, gently; for the loud tongue was growing louder and the red face redder. Self-restraint, he knew, was not one of his mother's characteristics—perhaps that was why he had been obliged to learn it himself.

"My money is my own" ("my ain," she pronounced it, dropping, as she always did in excitement, into the speech of her youth). "If ye vex me, and marry against my will, lad, ye may do the best ye can with that wretched hole, Blackhall; go and starve in the musty old rooms among the mice and rats, as I dare say your father would have liked to do; but ye'll get naething out o' me. I hae thousands—hundreds of thousands—to spend, and to leave; but, though you're my ain, only son, marry that woman, and I'll neither gi'e ye, nor leave ye, ae bawbee."

She thought she had overwhelmed him, crushed him; but he stood there, without any visible change in him, except a certain loftiness of carriage and brightness of eye.

"Don't let us quarrel over money-matters, mother. As you say, do as you like with your own. If I have Blackhall, I shall be quite satisfied, and so will she."

"Then you mean to brave me, insult me, and marry her?"

"Not to insult you. But I certainly mean to marry her—if I can."

"With or without my consent?"

Roderick waited a minute, and then answered, in a very low tone, "Yes."

"Lad, lad! have ye gone clean daft? Do ye really mean what ye say?" For, apparently, until now, ever accustomed to entire and unquestioned authority, she had refused to believe him in earnest.

"I usually do mean what I say, mother, though I never say much—it is no use," Roderick answered, with a sigh. "What I asked of you was not money—you may give me much or little, or none, just as you choose—but your consent to my marriage, which you refuse. Why? Give me your reasons."

Mrs. Jardine hesitated, probably because she really had no reason to give, except the common one to people of her temperament, "I've said it, and I'll stick to it."

"What reasons can you have?" pursued Roderick, speaking very gently. "You have never seen the young lady—you can have no personal feeling about her, one way or other. She is well-born and bred, and remarkably well-educated. The only exceptions you can possibly take against her are, that she is, as I told you, not pretty," and he smiled—"well, mother, that is my concern—and that she has no fortune. If I could, I would have obviated that last difficulty by making over Blackhall to her at once, but I find I cannot, as it is entailed upon heirs male. The small sum, in ready money, left me by Cousin Silence, I shall settle upon her immediately, whether she is ever my wife or not, and glad am I that it should go to another Silence Jardine.

"It may go to the de'il for all I care," cried Mrs. Jardine, violently. "Do the best you can with your own, for nothing shall you ever get of mine. It's my duty to prevent your doing a mad thing, if I can. All your sisters say so, and your brothers-in-law, and indeed every friend to whom I have mentioned the matter."

"You have mentioned the matter then?" said Roderick, turning very pale. "While I kept dead

silence, and asked the same of you, you have been talking over me and my affairs with all your acquaintances. Thank you. That was indeed being a wise mother, and a kindly."

Frightened at his tone and manner, Mrs. Jardine tried to eat her words. "No, indeed, Rody. I would think shame to do that. I have told nobody—at least, almost nobody."

"Except my three sisters and their husbands, and the two or three particular friends to whom they have told it. Doubtless the whole of Richerden knows it perfectly by this time—that is, the version that you have given of it. Very well. So much the better for me. You have made my way quite clear, mother. Mademoiselle Jardine shall not be talked about, or compromised in any way. I have made up my mind now."

"And what might it be?—if your mother may presume to ask?"

"I shall go back to Switzerland, marry my cousin, if I can, and present her here as soon as possible as my wife. If she will not marry me, I—I shall never come home at all."

"Nae fear o' that. She'll tak' ye, lad; she'll jump at ye if she thinks you've got the siller."

"Mother"—Roderick spoke beneath his breath, in a white heat of suppressed passion—"mother, how dare you say such things to me? If there is a creature in the world that ought to be sacred to a woman, it is that other woman whom her son loves."

For a moment Mrs. Jardine seemed startled—even touched. She looked at her son, the son who seemed to have grown so suddenly old—nay, so suddenly wise, in his assertion of his manhood and its rights. His air was so manly, too; quiet, brave, and strong; and the strange beauty of his face—not merely handsomeness, but beauty, spiritual almost as a woman's—shone in it clearer than ever. A son for any mother to be proud of! And she was proud of him; yet she

was about to lose him, perhaps for ever. It was too hard ; the pain of it almost drove her wild.

"That other woman, as you call her, is nothing to me. You chose her without my knowledge, and you say you will marry her with or without my consent. Do it. But from that day I will never set eyes upon either her or you."

"Be it so," Roderick sprang up in irrepressible passion, and paced the room once, twice, then stopped opposite her. "You didn't really mean what you said? Mother—oh! mother." The appeal was almost like a cry, but in vain.

"I did mean it, and I do."

And there came into Mrs. Jardine's face a look such as in all his days Roderick had never before seen there. It reminded him of his grandfather; the clever, hard old man, who, by that mingled cleverness and hardness, had raised himself from the very dregs of the people, and died a millionaire, well respected, though little loved; of whom it was said that he never forgot a friend or forgave an enemy.

"Then, mother, it is no use our talking together any more. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Roderick held out his hand, but she did not take it. His voice was tender, sad—nay, almost broken-hearted; but hers was cold as a stone.

"By good-bye I do not imply that I am going away at once," said he, clinging unconsciously to some last hope. "It will take a few days to arrange my affairs. Shall I stay on here, or would you prefer my leaving the house?"

"Stay on here. It looks more respectable."

"You are right. And perhaps"—with a bitter accent—"that we may at least do things as you suggest, 'respectably,' you will be kind enough not to talk any more of me or my affairs, at least till I have left Richerden."

"Very well. The sooner you go the better."

"I know that."

And, seeing her rise to leave the room, he rose too and opened the door for her, with a sad gentleness which showed more plainly than ever the gulf which had opened between them—opened, perhaps, never to be closed more.

For five days they went on in the same way, keeping up a sort of piteous politeness before servants and guests, but otherwise never exchanging a word, and never meeting except at meals. Sometimes Roderick felt this state of things so dreadful that he would fain have fled from it; but to fly seemed such arrant cowardice; and besides, his strong sense of duty urged him to endure to the uttermost before he took the final step of throwing off parental authority, even though it were unjust authority.

"Yes," said the family lawyer, who, apparently knowing everything, had sent for him and talked to him on the subject, as did his two married sisters. Indeed, the poor fellow, who himself kept absolute silence, was talked to—or, worse, talked at—from morning till night by different members of his family, as if he had been the one black sheep therein, whom all were trying to lure back from his errant ways. "Yes, my dear sir," said the old man, "I own Mrs Jardine has her prejudices. And she has a strong will, too; and you have thwarted it—which no woman likes. But then, remember, she has money."

At which Roderick, who had otherwise replied nothing, howsoever or by whomsoever he was talked to, answered passionately, "I do remember. But I must now endeavour to forget it—and her. I have seen enough of riches and the curse of them. Now I am going to try poverty."

"Poor boy!" said the lawyer, half aside.

"My father's son can afford to be poor," continued Roderick, proudly. "And my father's argument to

me was always, 'Do a thing because it is right ;' never, 'Do it because I choose you to do it.' I think it right—the very highest right—to marry the woman I love, who is also the best woman I ever knew, and I mean to do it. I am ashamed," added he, "thus to bring up the name of a young lady who is still ignorant of my hopes concerning her: but I am forced to it. And now, will you explain exactly how my affairs stand?"

It was with some difficulty that he took in the explanation, for Roderick's education had been so utterly unbusiness-like that he had no notion of the sad mysteries of £ s. d. But he understood thus much, that his income would be greatly diminished, and that he would have to live entirely at that "old tumble-down place," Blackhall.

"*She* will not mind that," said he, smiling.

And the vision of her in her cheerful poverty—alas ! he had never seen any but the cheerful side of it—with her strong common sense and practical ways, gave him a soothing sense of comfort, a dim foreshadowing of what his life would be when she was that "help-meet" which a man should always seek in a woman. Happy if he find her neither idol nor slave, but equal friend, bearer, glad and proud, of half his burdens ; not only guided by him, but sometimes guiding him, too, on the right, the prudent, the holy way.

"I'll try to keep right," Roderick said to himself. "I'll try to hold my own, and yet do nothing wrong to anybody if I can help it. But oh ! it's hard to bear. I don't think I can bear it much longer alone."

And he might not, for his nature was very tender, and it was a single-handed battle against every creature that belonged to him ; had any of them, especially his mother, said to him a single kind word !

But nobody did say it ; not even on the last night, which they knew was his last—that he would never again sleep under his mother's roof. He had told her

so, yet she had a dinner-party that evening, at which she sat opposite to him, wearing her diamonds, and beaming all over with those exuberant spirits which always rose to the highest pitch whenever Mrs. Jardine was dispensing her magnificent hospitalities.

Perhaps she wanted to make him feel all he was throwing away, the things she prized so highly : perhaps she did not really believe he would have the heart to renounce them. It seemed to Roderick that never had his mother looked so radiant, so happy, as on that night—the night which she must have known was their last together, and which she had signalized by giving, as he overheard her triumphantly telling one of her guests, “the very biggest dinner that ever was given in Richerden.”

It ended at last, and the mother and son stood alone together, as many a time before, in the drawing-room, or rather in the dining-room, the “banquet-hall deserted,” where, with a curious mixture of economy which ran like a thread through her lavish luxury, she was examining into and locking up the remains of the wine.

“Good night, mother,” holding out his hand, which she did not take—she had not taken it nor offered him the slightest caress for five days. “Good night and good-bye ; for I shall be away before you are up to-morrow morning.”

“Away ! Where to ? Oh ! I remember.” She laughed contemptuously. “No, no, laddie ; you’re not such a fool !”

“Better be a fool than a knave, as I should be, if I forsook my cousin, an orphan without a penny in the world, because my mother has a prejudice against her.” He spoke bitterly, but immediately checked himself. “Mother, I am neither fool nor knave, but an honest man ; and I act honestly and openly in telling you what I mean to do. I shall marry Mademoiselle Jardine, if she will take me. If not, I will be a good

cousin and friend to her; and help her all that I can."

"With your large income, which of course you will tell her of beforehand."

"I shall tell her everything, and then even you cannot accuse her of making a mercenary marriage. Oh, mother, mother!"—the tears rushed to his eyes and almost choked his voice—"why are you so hard to me? I want none of your money—do whatever you like with it—but I want your blessing, your love. Why can't you love me as you used to do?" (Mrs. Jardine turned round, half mollified.) "Only, you must love her as well."

"Never! Never as long as I live."

Without another word Mrs. Jardine gathered up her velvet skirts and sailed out of the room, slamming the door after her.

Perhaps her son was weak; perhaps he ought to have followed her—persuaded her—come to some definite conclusion with her. But he had a natural horror of "scenes;" struggles from which her rugged and yet easy temperament came out triumphant—nay, refreshed; while he, cast in finer and gentler mould, felt their effects for hours afterwards. Perhaps, too, having said he was going next morning, he should have gone; but he did not go.

Mrs. Jardine must have guessed or known this, for, when she came down and found him in the breakfast-room, she made no remark, only slightly smiled. And no conversation passed between the mother and son except upon the boiling of the eggs.

After breakfast, she went about her customary business, or pleasure, in her customary manner, even saying to the servants in his presence, "to have Mr. Roderick's dinner all ready for him at seven o'clock as she should be absent till nine."

"You forget, mother," he said, "I shall be absent too, I must leave to-night."

“ Stuff and nonsense ! I'll believe it when I see it.”

These were her last words, loud and angry, as she went out of the room. For long and long he tried hard to forget them and her face, as she looked then—alas ! that ever a son should wish to forget his mother's face !—but he never could. They haunted him all through that cruel day, when he busied himself with putting his things together—very helplessly, for he was one of those men who can do little for themselves, and always instinctively rest on a woman's care ; through the solitary night, when, alone in the railway carriage, he tried to collect his thoughts and could hardly believe that he had left his mother's roof for ever.

But so it was. Thus, in the most common-place way, without any tragic scene, if that is not the deepest tragedy of which there is no outward sign—thus, alas ! had been broken a tie which, when perfect, is the most perfect and the closest in all this world ; and even when imperfect, as in this case, has in it a depth and tenderness which is scarcely fully felt until it is broken.

Though his conscience could accuse him of nothing ; though he had done all that mortal man could be expected to do, in the piteous crisis in which he found himself ; and though now, safe and free, he felt himself sweeping on across land and sea towards the desire of his heart, with a firm hope, even more than hope, of winning and possessing, still, for many, many hours, there could scarcely be found a more miserable man than Roderick Jardine.

CHAPTER XIV.

FOUND.

HUMAN nature is human nature, and all people, even parents, must get what they earn. Had Roderick's mother bade him go through fire and water for her sake, explaining the why and wherefore, he would have done it; he was one of those who never shrink from doing anything, for duty or for love. But when she insisted upon blind obedience, giving no reasons, listening to no explanations, merely asserting her own imperious will, "I say it, therefore it must be," backing her words by the power of punishing which fortune had laid in her hands, then her authority failed; as such tyranny ever must fail, save with cowards and time-servers.

Roderick stayed a day in London, at an hotel, the address of which he had carefully written out and left upon Mrs. Jardine's dressing-table, waiting vaguely in the hope of some blessed telegram that might change his miserable journey into a happy one. Then he started; and, when he found himself drifting away from Dover pier under the cold clear winter stars, he felt as if he had cut the cable of his old life for ever.

Now, whatever happened, he was at least free: free from Richerden and all its intolerable shams, its burdensome luxuries and thinly disguised vulgarities. How he hated them all; and, in his passionate youth, how harshly he judged them all! Now, he thought, he could carve out a life for himself—a life of useful, honourable toil, simplicity, and peace: such as his father had often talked to him about, wherein the new generation should carry out all that the old had lost.

"Oh, father, father!" Roderick looked up to the

winter stars under which they two had walked together so many an hour, and which still seemed a strong bond of union, a kind of memorial witness between the living and the dead. "Father, I am glad you are dead and know nothing of all this. Or else that you know everything, which I almost believe you do."

And the solemn nearness of the dead, contrasted with the sad far-off-ness of the living, comforted him, in a way by which such natures are comforted, and other and different natures cannot in the least understand.

By-and-by, as the gleaming circle of Dover lights receded, and mile after mile of stormy sea rose up between him and England, Roderick began to look forward, not backward. Who would not, at his age, with a passionate first love thrilling every nerve, and wakening every power of brain, heart, and soul? Once in his life, some one says, every man becomes a poet. Then, too, almost every man becomes a hero, capable of the bravest acts, the noblest self-denials.

If any one had seen Roderick now, they would have seen a boy no more, but a man. The very expression of his face had changed. Its softness and dreaminess were gone; there was firmness in the mouth and fire in the eyes; the strength to do and to dare, which comes to all generous souls when it is not alone themselves that they have to think of, had entered his heart.

"I *will* have her," he said to himself, for the thousandth time, and kept pondering over every possible way in which he was to tell her so; to woo her down, Diana-like, from her blue heaven of saintly peace, and make her stoop to become a mortal wife. And, alas! a poor man's wife. But that, he felt, was his best chance. Roderick Jardine, with unquestioned thousands a year to lay at her feet, would, to a girl like Silence, be infinitely less dear than Roderick Jardine—just himself—asking her to love and comfort him, to help him and work with him, to take her fair share in

the burden of life, the best lightening of which would be that it was borne together.

That she could bear it, he had not the shadow of a doubt. In those six weeks—no, two months—of constant association, he had seen more of her than nine men out of ten ever see of the woman they choose as a life-companion; choose her out of ball-rooms, croquet-grounds, pic-nic parties, a mere Elle-maid, as he had once laughingly said to his mother. But this was a real woman, strong as gentle, human and loving,

“And yet a spirit still, and bright,
And something of an angel light.”

“Ay, even though, as I told my mother, she is ‘not pretty,’” laughed he to himself, as he recalled with a thrill of passionate remembrance the soft grey dress (alas! forgetting it was black now), the slender figure, the clustering light curls, and the whole simple sweetness of that vision of perfect womanhood, now for ever before his mental eye. Was it wonderful if all his Richerden life, the sharp voices and unkind looks, the atmosphere of sham elegance and real coarseness, that strange mixture of extravagance and meanness, of worldliness and religion, or rather religiousness, in which he had been brought up, faded away from his memory; and he thought only of the other atmosphere into which fate had driven him, where a certain heavenly influence seemed to make hard things easy, and sad things sweet, to bring peace in the midst of poverty, and love and calmness through deepest sorrow—sorrow, which led the way to joy. The joy that was approaching, even though it was the mere bliss of being near her, of being able to help her, as a man helps a woman, and a woman rejoices in that sweet dependence, filled his whole being: coming nearer and nearer with every lessening mile.

By the time he reached Pontarlier the strong tension had changed this hope almost into a fear. What might

not have happened during the weeks that had passed since he heard anything of her? She might have been ill—dying; but, no! he had a certain trust in the good Reyniers, and in the silent freemasonry between himself and Sophie. No misfortune could have come, or he would have known it.

Nevertheless, as he swept along through the Val de Travers, as once before—only then it was in morning sunshine, and now in the chill shadows of early dawn—a great solemnity came over him. The bare trees, the silent snow-topped crags of the ravine, seemed a warning that all things come to an end, even youth and love. Only, will the young ever believe this? Or rather, why should they? Because, though in a sense it is true, in another it is utterly, divinely false. When he came out above Neuchâtel and saw the eternal Alps still standing in their place, the long wavy line of snowy white above the deep blue lake, Roderick felt, by an intuition beyond all reasoning, as he had felt the first day when he looked into her eyes—a stranger's eyes—at Berne. And again at Lausanne, when they talked together of love until death—ay, and after. For, when two who have loved one another see life drawing to an end, does there not come a mysterious sense of a new life just beginning, a life of absolute and heavenly union, of which human marriage, when perfect, is the nearest type? Strange how, even now, in the fulness of youth and strength, Roderick's imagination leaped forward fearlessly to the time when, every charm faded, he should clasp in his arms the one woman he had loved—the woman who had loved him, and him only; whom, whatever they might be to the world, this divine unity of love made each to the other eternally young.

Reaching the hotel, after his long night's journey, the familiar faces and the bright Swiss welcome warmed his heart. It was Sunday morning—during that mis-

erable week he had almost lost count of days—and all the good people of Neuchâtel were gone to church: doubtless also the Reynier family. Still he could not rest. He thought he would just go and see the outside of the house, perhaps hear she was well, and then hover about for a glimpse of her, till he could speak to the professor, her nominal protector, and ask permission, after the fashion of the country, formally to offer his hand. For he was determined no respect, no decorum, should be wanting in anything he did, down to the commonest outside *convenances*, towards the woman he adored.

His hand almost shook as he rang the bell of Professor Reynier's door—for after all he could not pass it—and his voice failed, and his disused French seemed to fly away from him, when he faced the little *bonne*, who at once recognizing him, and breaking out into the most courteous of smiles, showed him in quite like “un ami de la famille.”

They were all well—they would return from church immediately—Monsieur must allow himself to wait—her master would be charmed to see him. Would Monsieur repose himself in the salon? No one was there, she believed.

And for the first moment he believed so too, and sat down, looking tenderly round on the familiar room—the Paradise where his Eve had appeared to him that first night—making ever afterwards the whole world new. The dear, silent, empty room! Empty? no! something stirred in a recess; some person, sitting there reading, rose with a slow, listless air, came forward, suddenly stopped.

The slender figure, the black dress, the fair, clustering curls—Roderick started up. The whole thing was so sudden, so unexpected, that there was no time for any disguises on either side. Besides, both were so young; and it is in later life that love

learns concealment. As they stood, these two young creatures, face to face, and quite alone, no human power could have concealed the joy of both.

Roderick advanced a step. "Me voici ! je suis revenu," was all he said, speaking in French, as seemed most natural.

"Oui, oui, oui !" and, with a glad cry, Silence clasped her hands, the first impulsive gesture he had ever seen her use ; "oui, il est revenu !"

The minute afterwards—he knew not how ; in truth, neither ever did know—he felt her in his arms, gathered close to his breast, sheltering and sheltered there as if it were her natural refuge. He did not kiss her—he dared not ; but he touched her soft hair as it lay on his shoulder ; he pressed her, all shaking with sobs, to his breast ; he called her by her name—first, "ma cousine," and, then, "Silence." An instant more, and putting her a little apart from him, so that he could look down into her eyes, he breathed, rather than spoke, another word—an English word—"My wife."

Silence shrank back for one moment, trembling violently, dropped her face, all scarlet, and then lifted it up with a strange pathos of entreaty, almost appeal, as if she had but him in the whole world.

"Your mother," he whispered—"your mother knew it all."

"Then—yes !"

Roderick drew her back again, close into his very heart, and pressed his lips upon hers. In that long, silent, solemn troth-plight the two became one—for ever.

CHAPTER XV.

BETROTHED.

WHAT a change, sudden as wonderful, unto Roderick, as unto any human being with a heart, a soul, and a conscience!—to pass from the lonely, selfish, or at least self-absorbed, existence of idle youth, useless and aimless, into the double life, with all its duties strongly and clearly defined, which every one takes, and ought to take, upon himself or herself, after that great crisis “engaged to be married,”—when both cease to be sufficient to themselves, and each becomes the right of the other; man and woman together forming the complete being, as is the holy law of marriage. And however some, having fallen short of it, may doubt, disbelieve, or even deride it, still this holy law remains the same, and still unbroken, open for every new generation to strive after; the ideal—possible, and sometimes attained—of true love and perfect marriage. Few find it maybe; but if found——

Roderick felt that he had found it. When, for the first time in his life, thank God! he clasped a woman to his breast, the one beloved woman who to him was all the world; when, gazing deep down into her eyes, he saw reflected there a heaven of pure love—the love that seemed to look beyond himself and into heaven—there came to him a great calmness. He was satisfied. He felt himself no longer solitary, restless, drifting hither and thither as fancy or feeling led. His life now had a distinct purpose, an unquestioned duty. He had taken the helm in his hand, and was ready to sail away across any seas, known or unknown, if only he had her beside him—his friend, companion, helpmate, wife.

“My wife!” He said the word over and over to

himself, with a strangely solemn tenderness, as he walked home to his hotel that night, after such a happy Sunday. Ay, though the wind blew and the rain fell, all day long, outside the little window alcove where he and his betrothed were left to sit and talk. For, immediately on the family's return from church, he had asked for an interview with M. Reynier, and explained everything, while Silence did the same to Madame Reynier and the girls. There had been due congratulations, both formal and tearful, from the simple affectionate Swiss household, and then the thing was an accepted fact; the young people were *fiancés* and treated as such, according to the fashion of the country, which holds the bond almost as sacred as that between husband and wife.

His wife! Yes! heart and soul took in the dear new word, only a few hours old, and felt that it was making a new man of him. Not the mere selfish rapture of attaining his prize, but the deep, peaceful joy of being the one object of a woman's love; of holding her happiness in his keeping; of having taken root, so to speak, and given himself the chance of growing into a goodly tree for the shelter of many, instead of floating, floating, mere driftwood, down the remorseless river of life, which hurries us all away so fast. He might have many cares, many sorrows, but he had, and would ever have, the one sheet-anchor of life, pure and righteous love. For though he had chosen suddenly, and almost by instinct, he felt that he had chosen righteously, neither rashly nor blindly, and that he need not be afraid. Nay, with her beside him, it seemed to Roderick as if in the whole wide world there was now nothing to fear.

After that Sunday, that day of days, came eight or ten days more, slipping peacefully by: he preferred to let them slip. First, because on that very night he had again written to his mother; a long, tender letter, explaining exactly how things stood with him, and

entreating her once more to reconsider the question, and let him give her blessing to his bride, without ever having told, or having had need to tell, poor Silence that she came into the family unwelcome and unblessed. Waiting the answer to this last earnest appeal, he rested on the delicious present, in the new life, wonderful as new, which had opened before him.

Something else had opened too, unlocked by that betrothal kiss, the sweet, pure, maidenly soul, so reticent by nature, that otherwise it might have remained for ever "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed."

"If you had not loved me," she said to him one day, "I think I should never have loved any man alive. Now it seems all so natural, so right, so sweet." And she laid her head down on his shoulder. "Oh, if my mother knew how safe and happy I am! how you will take care of me always! But, also—I think I shall take care of you."

"Yes, my darling."

For, well as he had thought he knew her, until she was really his own he never guessed what depths of tenderness lay hid in her—tenderness rather than passion. She was not a girl who would have died for love, or done wrong for love; but that she could love, through good and ill, through joy and sorrow, with a tenacity of fidelity that few, even among women, are capable of, her betrothed read in her eyes. And amidst all the passion of his youth it was a sort of balance-weight—this steady calm of hers—making them in a sense each the complement of the other, as in marriage it should be; diverse but not opposing elements, welded together in one harmonious whole.

A week went by, and still he heard nothing, had told her nothing, of his own people, except briefly answering her innocent questions, that his mother was quite well and his sister married. But each day he felt that the time was come when he must tell her. Nay, her quick-sighted love was already piercing

through the generous hypocrisy he was practising—beginning to read his face, as women always read the one face that they love, and to find out that he was not quite happy, not even beside her.

“I am sure there is something on your mind, my friend” (she often called him by that innocent translation of “*mon ami*,” being still shy of saying “Roderick”). “Could you not tell me? You mean to tell me everything, do you not?”

“Yes, my love—my love of loves! the one human being to whom I can tell everything,” said he passionately, as he pressed her hand against his heart.

They were walking arm-in-arm up and down the cemetery, their favourite promenade, strange and *triste* as it was, the Reyniers thought. These two did not think so; not even though a few steps from them was the new little mound, with the white cross at the head of it, which Roderick had already caused to be erected, marking the mother’s soon-to-be-forsaken grave. “But she will not mind—you will not mind,” he had said, in gently hinting this possibility as a reason for completing everything. “If the dead can know anything, she knows that I think of her and of my father together, and that I will take care of you and cherish you—so help me God!—as long as He keeps me in this world.”

They were rather a singular pair of lovers, not given to much sentimental demonstration; rather more like old married people. They would sit together hour by hour, he reading, she sewing; troubling nobody; seeming to want nothing but the mere bliss of being together. At least, it was evidently so with her; and when he looked at her calm, sweet face, so full of innocent peace, Roderick, with a deep pang, pressed all his own troubles deep down into his heart, thanking God that he had a man’s strength to bear them all—bear them, if needs be, for two.

This might have gone on still longer, he shrank so

from the cruel task of giving pain to his innocent darling, had it not been for a letter which came one morning, the very morning when he took her to look at the new white cross, and she had asked him to "tell her everything." He had told her a good deal; how the repairs were progressing at Blackhall—not restorations, only needful repairs; which he had left in charge of Mr. Black, the factor—desiring that nothing might be altered which was not absolutely necessary. But in reading the letter to Silence, he had omitted the P.S., which ran thus:—

"I saw Mrs. Jardine this morning. She was quite well; and looked exceedingly well. She had let her house for the winter, and was just starting on a round of visits in England. She bade me tell you she had received your last letter, and there was 'no answer.'"

Then she was inexorable, this woman who called herself a mother. As Roderick stood beside the grave of the dead mother here and thought of his own, he could almost have forgotten his manhood and burst into an agony of childish tears.

But he did not; he controlled himself, thinking how best he could break to Silence, whose only idea of motherhood was perfect love, perfect trust, the fact that there were other mothers—shall I say God forgive them, or only God pity them?—who could act differently; yet, perhaps, acting not unconscientiously according to their several lights.

Roderick tried to think so; with his whole heart he tried: in true filial duty abstaining from harsh judgment, and saying to himself, "It is because we are so different that she cannot understand. Still, still——"

"What are you thinking about? Is there anything in the letter that vexes you? or anything that you have not read to me?" She spoke in her pretty broken English; she always talked English with him now; and she looked him straight in the face with her innocent eyes. "I shall not mind your not telling

me everything, if you say distinctly, 'I have reasons. I would rather not.' But still I think it would be better—better for us both, if you did tell me."

"You are right," he answered, with an almost convulsive clasp of the hand which lay on his arm, which she returned. It was one of the touching peculiarities of her that now she was betrothed she never seemed the least shy or ashamed of loving him, of identifying herself with him, and of belonging to him, and him alone, without an atom of coquetry, or exactingness, or doubt. That delight in teasing, in showing their power, which so many girls—really generous and good girls—have with their lovers, was in Silence Jardine altogether absent. She simply loved him, nothing more.

"Now tell me, what is it!" she said. "It will not hurt me. Nothing can hurt me now, except so far as it hurts you. Tell me."

So he told her, as briefly and tenderly as he could, without compromising the truth. He attributed Mrs. Jardine's objections to his marriage chiefly to her vexation that his bride was of another country and had no *dot*. Of the family riches, or his own, he said as little as possible; and, in truth, Silence did not seem to take in that phase of the subject, or be affected thereby. The one thing which struck her—and, put it as carefully as he would, it could not fail to strike her like a heavy blow—was the fact that he was marrying her without his mother's consent, and hopeless of ever winning it.

"We never do that here," she said, faintly. "It is, I think, impossible, illegal."

"It is not so in our free England," Roderick answered, passionately. "No injustice, even of parents, is allowed to blight our lives. After a man is twenty-one, or a woman either, both can walk out of their parents' door and in at any church-door and be married in face of all the world, which is a right and righteous thing——"

"Hush!" she whispered; and he saw that her face was white, and the touch of her poor little hand deadly cold. "We will not talk any more of this to-day. To-morrow."

"But we must talk of it, my dearest," cried Roderick.

Seized with sudden apprehension, he almost wished for the moment that he had used deceit, or at least concealment—given some vague reasons, easily credited by her who so innocently believed everything, for his mother's silence, and so married her, not letting her guess the whole sad truth till she was married, and it was too late to retract. But second thoughts recalled him to himself, and he knew that he had acted rightly; that a generous woman, deceived in any point before marriage, may afterwards forgive, but to forget, never! Any deception, then, strikes the key-note struck by wise Shakespeare when he makes Desdemona's father say bitterly—

"Look to her, Moor! if thou hast eyes to see.
She has deceived her father, and may thee."

"Love, my own love!" pleaded Roderick, "you will not be angry with me for daring to tell you the whole truth. Do not cast me off! My mother has done it, you see. I have now not a soul to make a home for me, to take care of me, to keep me right. No, I don't mean that exactly. I am not quite such a coward as to compel the girl I love to marry me by saying I shall be ruined if she does not. You make me good; but your forsaking me should not make me bad," added he, proudly.

She smiled, a proud smile too.

"No, I am not afraid of that."

"But you will not forsake me? My darling, we are two lonely creatures. Let us cast our lots together, and let us do it as soon as possible!"

Silence started, all the blood rushing to her face.

"Oh! no, no. Think of this," touching her black dress; adding with a cruel sob, "Mother, my mother, you loved him so! And *his* mother rejects me, will not have me for her child." Then, seeing the misery in her lover's face, she suddenly brightened, with a tender, fitful brightness, like the sun through a shower. "My poor Roderick! my dear Roderick! We are very unhappy, both of us; but we will try to bear our pain together. I will think all this over. You must let me think it over quietly, and not expect me to say anything, one way or other, for this night at least. We will part now. Do not walk home with me. Come and see me to-morrow morning!"

"Not walk home with you! Not see you till to-morrow morning!"

In the smothered passion of his voice, the agonized entreaty of his eyes, Silence must have seen, have felt, how dear she was to him: that dearness and nearness which, when a woman once finds out, her own heart re-echoing the truth, and teaching her to believe it, is a heaven of happiness never lost—no, not even in the supremest anguish of separation, or the final parting of death.

"Roderick," she whispered, putting her cold little hands in his; they stood together in the shelter of the cemetery wall; the early December dusk had already fallen, and there was not a creature near. "My Roderick, kiss me—kiss and forgive!"

He kissed her—that sacrament of the lips which only faintly expresses the union, through life and after, of soul to soul; and both were comforted and at peace. Nevertheless, in walking home together, they scarcely spoke a single word.

Reaching the Reyniers' door, Roderick did not offer to enter; in truth, he felt that the usual social evening would be as impossible to him as to Silence. In their present crisis of pain they needed either to be quite alone with each other, or entirely apart.

So he parted from her, lingeringly and tenderly, and spent the whole evening and best part of the night in writing home, arranging, with his masculine ignorance, everything he could think of domestically, concerning the repairs at Blackhall. Failing their completion, he began to consider whether he could not, just till the winter's end, take a furnished house in Richerden. His mother being absent, would make this no objectionable thing; on the contrary, there would be a certain proud, indignant pleasure in bringing his bride home to his native place, and presenting her boldly to all his friends—even his sisters, supposing they were amenable to reason and common sense. They had each homes of their own, and honest, sensible husbands besides; it is generally the women, not the men, who make and fan family “differences.”

Should his sisters fail, being still much under the influence of the strong, capable mother, ten times cleverer than any of her daughters—well! he would then show them, would be glad of an opportunity of showing, that he was not the “boy” they thought him, but a man capable of acting for himself, and not ashamed of anything, least of all of his marriage and his wife.

“Whatever I am, I am at least no coward,” thought Roderick to himself, as he braced his quivering nerves, and choked down the tears that would spring, woman-like, to his eyes, when he thought of the forlorn homecoming that might be, instead of the triumphant bringing home of the bride. “No matter, she will be mine then—she is mine now—and I will defend her and uphold her to my last breath.”

CHAPTER XVI.

HOLD OR LOSE.

SPITE of all his courage overnight, when Roderick saw his betrothed next morning, looking deadly pale, but assuming a faint smile of welcome, and sitting down beside him in the old way, though, he noticed, with a slight hesitation, as if doing as a duty what had before been so natural and sweet, his heart sank. He waited in a fever of apprehension for what she had to say, or rather he tried to prevent her saying it by talking about what he had been writing in the matter of Blackhall. To all of which she answered only by a pale smile, then said, gently—

“You forget, my friend, the matter we had to speak about to-day.”

“No, I do not forget—but yesterday, when I spoke of our marriage, it seemed to pain you.”

“It will not to-day, for I have been thinking it all over, and——”

“You are trembling! You are ill, my darling!”

“Oh, no!” gently putting aside, and then yielding to, his tender caress. “Don’t mind me, I am not ill; but I lay awake the whole of last night, and it is trying when the morning breaks upon one and there is no rest, no division between two days—two such dreadful days.”

“Dreadful! Why? What do you mean?”

Silence recovered herself. It was wonderful the power she had, that little gentle thing, of restraining emotion and speaking calmly. To him, born with a temperament in which every nerve was sympathetically alive, quick to joy and equally so to pain, this quality in her was a rest inexpressible.

She took his hand and stroked it with a gesture almost motherly.

"Listen to me. I have a good deal to say, and you must listen. You will? I shall not hurt you, my Roderick—not very much! And that I love you—ah, you know it—only too well, if that were possible. But it is impossible! Were you a vain man, or a tyrant, or selfish, it might harm you, and I should be afraid; but you are none of the three. You are Roderick, my Roderick! I shall never love any man in this world but you!"

"Of course not; it would be very wrong." But suddenly his attempt at a smile faded in a vague terror. "Why tell me this? What do you mean?"

"Hush! Listen to a little story which struck me very much when I was a young girl, and I thought of it again last night. Our canton, you know, is Protestant, but there were in the village two young *fiancés*, both Catholics. He took a fancy to turn monk——"

"What an idiot!"

"Never mind that. I do not argue the point; he did it for conscience sake. He was a good man. One day he came and told her they could never be married, that he did not think it right to marry."

"Faugh! And the girl—what did she do?"

"What do you think she ought to have done?" Then hastily, as if to prevent an answer, "She said to him—it was she herself who told me—'Mon bien-aimé, if you think it right, I am content. You will never marry, nor shall I; therefore we belong to one another still. And you loved me, you will always love me; that is enough!' It was. They are alive still, I believe. He is a priest, and she a *Sœur de la Charité*. We Protestants thought it strange and wrong, but she never blamed him. Her answer to everybody was, 'He thought it right!' and 'He loved me!' Poor Clotilde! I could not understand her then: I can now."

"Why?" asked Roderick, trembling.

"Do you not see, my friend? The cases are scarcely quite equal, but there is a likeness, enough to show me my duty."

"Your duty! What is it? What do you mean?"

"I think"—she spoke very slowly, and softly—"I think we ought to part."

For the moment, Roderick was completely stunned. Her whole manner was so quiet that a stranger might have imagined she felt nothing, that she had no feelings at all. A slight quiver about the mouth, a tighter compression of the fingers—she had taken her hands away from his, and clasped them together on her lap—that was all. Shallow people might have wholly misjudged her; even her lover did, a little.

"And—you say this—quite calmly—as if you did not care!"

"Not care! Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!"

It was not said in the light French way of using the Great Name, but in the agonized appeal that we all make instinctively in moments of acute anguish to One above all, the only One who knows all and can understand all.

Then she turned imploringly to Roderick.

"Do not be angry with me, I do not deserve it; only listen, it is for your good I speak. Yesterday I believed—you made me believe—that it would be the best thing in the world for you to marry me. Now I doubt."

"Why?"

"Can you not see? It costs you so much—far, far too much: loss of fortune, though money is a small thing comparatively; loss of your mother, and her love. Oh! it would break my heart if, through me, you were to lose your mother."

"I have already lost her; or rather since I could so lose her, I could never have had her really," said Roderick, with great bitterness. He might have said more, but was checked by the sweet amazement in Silence's

face. "You cannot understand, my dearest. My mother and I were never like you and your mother ; it was a totally different thing."

"Still you were mother and son. She loved you."

"Yes, she loved me," said Roderick, turning away his head to hide the spasm of pain. He had such a tender heart—too tender for a man, some would have said. But the woman who loved him did not say so. Only, with the wonderful instinct of love, she leapt to conclusions which made her feel that she must harden herself, to save him. It was the sole way.

"Do not let us talk of my mother," Roderick continued. "Love is shown in actions, not words. There comes a time when a man is no longer in leading-strings ; he must judge and act for himself. If he acts conscientiously and openly, his parents ought to respect him, whether they like it or not. My father would have done so. Oh, Silence, how my father would have loved you !"

"Perhaps he does love me," said she, with the soft, far-away look peculiar to her, and so seldom seen, except in the eyes of little children. "Perhaps it is that which helps me. Something, or somebody, must have helped me, or, I think, I should have died last night."

"My poor love !"

Silence turned round suddenly, clasped him round the neck, and, hiding her face on his shoulder, wept as if her heart would break, then suddenly dried her tears.

"Now it is over. I have made up my mind—that is, so far as, being *fiancée*, I have a right to make up my mind. I think it would be best for you to go home at once, and tell your mother that we have parted, that we thought it best to part."

Roderick sat, dead silent.

"Otherwise, think what will happen ! You will be comparatively poor——"

“And you are afraid of poverty?”

The moment he had said the words he felt their meanness, their utter untruthfulness, and passionately begged her pardon.

“What need?” Silence answered, half sadly. “The question is not whether you hurt me, or I you, or whether we vex one another, but whether we do what is right, absolute right. That is the real heart of love. If I thought a thing right, I would do it, and help you to do it, though it killed me—ay, even though it killed us both.”

And, as she spoke, her voice never faltered, though her face was white to the lips. Roderick felt a strange sense of awe, and yet peace, for he saw in her the woman he had dreamed of, the sort of woman that a weak man fears, a selfish man scoffs at, but a thoroughly noble man recognizes as his noblest self, ready to be at all times, and under all circumstances, his strength and consolation.

“I understand you,” he said, with a quietness that was a marvel even to himself. “But it is a very difficult matter to decide, and we must decide, for our whole two lives hang in the balance. Let me go away, think it out alone—quite alone.”

He rose, with a sad grave air, and went to the door, then came back and kissed her hand.

“My love! my only love! Yes, I have found you. It is not every man’s lot so to find. Whatever happens, I thank God.”

Without more words he went away to his favourite “thinking-place,” a quiet walk along the lake-shore. Many an hour had he spent there within the last few months, but never such an hour as this.

He was at the age when life is at full spring-tide with most men, when self-restraint, or even the power of seeing aught besides themselves and their own will, is rare to all. One or two good Swiss folk who passed “ce monsieur Anglais,” already well known in the

little town, and who thought that he must have an extraordinary fondness for pedestrianism, and a great indifference to weather, little suspected that in him was then raging the battle fought in every young life, the St. George and the Dragon combat which, soon or late, must be gone through.

Even Silence had fought it; fought it, poor child! alone, in the dead of night—was fighting it now, though when Sophie came in gaily and asked where her renegade knight had vanished, leaving her all alone, she only replied that “she had sent him out for a walk; he would be back presently.”

Yes, he would come back, with the fiat of life or death in his hands. Byron, who wrote so many false things, wrote one true one—

“Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart,
’Tis woman’s whole existence.”

At least, this is true of most women; and she of whom it is not true is scarcely a woman at all.

Though all the time Sophie sat chatting beside her, Silence neither wept nor complained, asked no sympathy, and betrayed by no word that anything was amiss; still, when the door opened and she saw her lover appear, a shiver ran through her, which made the kind-hearted Sophie, with a troubled and anxious look, immediately disappear.

So once more they were alone together, these two young creatures, learning so early their hard lesson, and trying so painfully to learn it well, to do the right and fear nothing. Alas! a lesson never ended for us all, our whole life long. Will it, in the next life, end—or only begin again?

But with these two it was this world, this life, still; their lot was in their own hands, and they knew it. Clearly, Roderick knew it. As he came and stood before his betrothed, the boyish irresolution sometimes visible in him was altogether gone. All the man, strong, true, tender, shone in his loving eyes.

Silence saw this at a glance, and the light came back to her own; but still she did not attempt to speak. And when Roderick sat down beside her, instead of the usual fond, half-involuntary, shy approach, the instinct of shelter and protection, she sat motionless, as if determined by no winning look or word to sway her lover into any resolve that was not absolutely his own act and deed.

He too—there was that in him which makes tenderness all the sweeter—even passion only the most passionate, because of its self-restraint.

“My love,” he said, “I have been thinking over everything; trying to see the right and wrong of things—simple right and wrong, without relation to ourselves at all. My father could do it, and used to say he believed I could when I was tried. I hope so; I hope I can judge calmly, without being either selfish or unjust. Am I?”

“No! a thousand times no.”

“Well, then, if you can rely on me—and I think you may—the case stands thus. How far, and for how long, ought the parents’ will to be an absolute law to the children? and how much of their happiness, or what they believe to be such, ought children to sacrifice to their parents?”

“A great deal, oh! Roderick, a great deal. Think, if my mother were alive—or your father.”

“Yes, but——” he did not say what he was going to say, that there are parents—and parents: concerning whom God only, and perhaps the children themselves, can know the difference. “My father is dead, or all would have been well. As to my mother, if she had any good reason to prevent my marrying, if mine were a rash, disgraceful, or even an imprudent choice, or if I had deceived her in any way, she would have a right to be angry. But she has none. I am making an honest, honourable, creditable marriage. I can perfectly well afford to marry; even if I lose every-

thing else, my father's property will keep us from want; and I am young, I can work. You, too—oh, my darling! if my mother knew what you are! But she ought to have known; she ought, in commonest justice to you and to me, to have taken some pains to find out."

Silence said nothing.

"That is, I feel, the cruelest wrong of all," Roderick went on. "To say to a son, 'You shall not marry,' offering no reasons except 'Because I do not wish it,' is as unjust as another thing which parents sometimes do—give young people like you and me every opportunity of meeting, every chance of loving one another, and then turn round and say, 'Nobody expected this, and it must not be.' I say it must be, it ought to be, or it ought to have been prevented in time. But here I am, arguing—arguing; what a pity my mother did not make me a barrister! It shows, anyhow, that I can judge the matter calmly, even though it concerns myself."

Still, under all his arguments, there was visible a great agitation, a vague dread.

"Perhaps when I am an old man—when we are both old people, my Silence—I may view the question differently. But I think not, I hope not. I hope I shall always believe as I do now, that right, absolute right, is the first thing in life—but, oh! love is the second. My best and dearest! the one woman in the world to me! it all comes to this: I cannot, will not, part from you; I should not be doing right if I did part from you."

He extended his arms, and for the moment Silence looked as if she would have flung herself into that dear refuge—she, alone, motherless, poor—but she did not. She held aloof—would not even let him take her hand.

"Stay a little. Roderick, you are very dear to me—dear as my own soul; but I could part from you, this minute, and for ever, if I thought it right."

"Could you?" he looked at her for an instant. "Yes, I know you could."

"And, above all, if I thought it good for you. Perhaps it might be good for you. You are young, you are ambitious, you will lose a great deal by marrying. Besides, you will be poor. For me, it does not matter; but you—can you bear it?"

"I will try," he said, smiling.

"But that is not the worst. The worst is—oh, my friend, have you considered?—that I cost you your mother. She will never love me, and she loves you. Suppose you should one day reproach me for having lost you your mother?"

"Never, while I have my wife."

At that word, spoken in English, though they had been talking in French, which Silence still dropped into occasionally, her face grew all rose-colour—a pure celestial rose, like the sun-set Alps.

"My wife," Roderick continued. "I must have you. I cannot do without you. My mother does not understand—some people never do. Some people think one love is as good as another; and perhaps it is, to them—but to us? I am yours, you are mine. What use is it to tell us we must not be married, when in our hearts we are already married? You believe that?"

"Yes," she said, and no more. Then, after a pause, "I believe in you so absolutely, so entirely, that I think if, instead of deciding thus, you had told me that our marriage could not be; that there were strong, clear, righteous reasons why I should never be more to you than I am now, I should have said, like that poor Clotilde, 'It is all right? I am content.'"

"But would it have been right? And would you have been content?"

She lifted up to him her pathetic eyes. "I would have tried to be. I will be now, if you only say the word; if there is in your mind the slightest doubt, the

slightest hesitation. It is not so hard, not so very hard, since you love me. If I had never known that, perhaps it might have been. Not now."

Roderick was silent.

"Is it to be, then, my friend? We are to part; but we are always to remain friends? And you will always love me—never any one else but me? At least, I know I shall never love any one but you."

"Oh, my darling!"

The strong curb which both had put upon themselves was gradually giving way. Human nature, or rather that divine instinct which rules and guides the strong passions of humanity, bringing them at last into the desired haven, the deep peace which comes, and only comes, when two, who have deliberately chosen one another, righteously belong to one another for life—human nature would have its way.

"My darling, we *must* love one another—we *must* be married. You left it to me to decide, and I have decided. It will be a pang in some ways, a risk in others—but it must be; it ought to be. Love is best. Come!"

He took her two hands to draw her to him. At that touch of his—soft, strong, and firm—the sort of clasp which implies, besides will and passion, the deep tenderness that includes both, and makes a woman safe for ever—all the girl's soul seemed to yield to him, the man who was now master of her fate. She looked him straight in the eyes—her one love who loved her.

"I would have lived," she cried—"yes, I would have lived! One has no right to break one's heart and die till God chooses. But life with you, and life without you—oh, the difference!"

Roderick clasped her in his arms, and they wept together like little children.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUTWARD BOUND.

AFTER that day there was no reserve of any kind between these two, who had determined to cast their lot together, and "sink or swim," as Roderick said with a smile, which showed how little he believed in the sinking. He was very unworldly in many things: ignorant too; often a great deal more ignorant than she, in all practical matters. As he showed when urging their immediate marriage, without thought of to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, or indeed of any earthly thing, except the eagerness to get safe possession of his treasure, and be sure that no evil fate could snatch it from him.

But Silence said no. She would not consent to be married until at any rate the first few months of her mourning had passed by; besides, with the customary pride of Swiss girls, she wished to earn her own trousseau, and not come to her husband quite empty-handed. Therefore she insisted on continuing her music-teaching, and paying her board to the Reynier family, and living as independent, busy, and practical a life as if she were not going to be married at all. Her "insistence" was, however, accomplished in no obnoxious or violent fashion, but merely a quiet way she had of doing for herself that which she felt to be right, without interfering with other people.

So Roderick, constrained by the gentle force of circumstances, took a leaf out of her book, as he declared, and began to work too—establishing himself at a pension in the town, and joining various classes, so as to pursue certain definite studies, and fill up a few blanks in an education which, out of the lazy

laissez-faire of prosperous fortunes, had been, even at Cambridge, a good deal neglected.

"But I shall neglect nothing now, you will see," he said to Silence. "I was a boy six months ago; you have made a man of me."

And she? Girlish as she looked still, you could see in her face that she was a girl no more. Grave, quiet, often almost sad, from that day when they decided to be married against every obstacle, she took in all things the serious, womanly part, assuming with love's joy all its inevitable pain. The half-motherly relation which almost every woman, however young, comes to take towards the man she loves, watching him, guarding him, cherishing him, Silence now assumed to the full, yet after a fashion so sweet, so unobtrusive, that the proudest man could not be offended.

"I wonder what makes you take so much trouble over me?" he said one day, when she had been suggesting a warmer coat, or some other trifle, the sweet trifles that show a man how a woman cares for him. "You are always thinking of me, dear."

"Because you never think of yourself," Silence answered, smiling. "Besides, I love you!"

That was the secret and its cause. She loved him as such a woman never loves twice in a life-time, and not even once, unless the object deserves it. Did Roderick? A question he asked himself sometimes, in the strange humility which had of late come over him; but, when he put it to his betrothed, she laid her hand on his mouth and told him "time would show."

They had to trust to time for the unveiling of many a dark thing. Once again Roderick wrote to his mother, informing her that he had delayed his marriage for three months, hoping against hope that, after all, it might not be that saddest of weddings, without a parent's blessing, but that, whether or not, it must be. He allowed her no possibility of believing that he

could change his mind. While opposing, he never deceived her, for deceit is always cowardice, and, whatever he was, Roderick was no coward.

So he worked on, and Silence worked on, seldom seeing each other during the day, but in the long winter evenings meeting under shelter of the Reyniers' kindly roof, and "taking sweet counsel together," like lovers who are also friends, and who feel in one another's company the delicious repose, the unspeakable comfort, of a sympathy which long survives passion, and lasts till the very end of life.

Their life was only at its beginning, yet the sadness of things made them prematurely grave, even when, coming to the conclusion that they must wait no longer, and that it was vain to hope for the letter which never came, Roderick pressed his young *fiancée* to name their marriage-day.

It was on one Sunday afternoon which they were spending with the good Reyniers at Chaumont. They had climbed the hill through the long pine-woods, and were now standing watching that lovely view, the triple chain of lakes, with its long line of snowy Alps beyond. The air was mild and soft; there were violets in the woods. It felt like the first day of spring, which always comes, as it were, with a message of promise to the young. Ay, and even to those whose youth is only a never-fulfilled remembrance.

"Silence," Roderick said, as he took in his the hand that would be his own through life, "I have finished all the work I had to do here. Now, when shall we go home?"

"Home?"

"Your new home, and mine; the home we are to share together."

Startled, she faltered out something about "waiting a little longer."

"I have waited. It is now nearly nine months since that day at Berne, when——"

“ ‘I did but see her passing by,
And yet I love her till I die.’ ”

“ That would have been very foolish,” said Silence, with a naïve gravity; “ unless, indeed, you had followed up the acquaintance, and come to know me well.” Then, suddenly putting her two hands in her lover’s — “ You do know me, faults and all, so take me; and, oh! be good to me. I have only you.”

“ And I you. You will be good to me also? ”

She smiled. “ Little use in talking, but I think there will never come a day when I would not cheerfully die, if my dying could help you. My living will, much more. So I mean to live.”

And she looked up fondly, with all her soul in her eyes, at her young bridegroom. Would she, forty, fifty years hence, see in the old man’s face that of this lover of her youth, the face forgotten by all but her? God knows! but it is good to believe so.

Ay, we elders may reason and preach, say that “ calf” love is all nonsense, and early marriage most imprudent, that young people should part and forget, and a broken heart is soon healed—every new generation gives the lie to that doctrine. True, hundreds fall in love and “ get over it; ” yet, now and then, there is such a thing as a lost love, and a lost life. Life with love, and life without it—that is, as Silence had once said, all the difference. But what a difference! For any parent who needlessly causes it, out of whim, or worldliness, or anything except righteousness and justice, I can only say, as was said of those who wilfully offend “ one of these little ones,” “ It were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depth of the sea.”

The marriage was arranged, of course, to be quite quiet. All the usual Swiss festivities, the *soirée aux bouquets* before the wedding, and the ball after it, were of necessity omitted. The Reynier family alone were to “ assist ” at the ceremony, when, the girls implored,

Silence would for one day only put off her mourning and assume proper bridal white. She assented, "because my mother would have liked it. She used often to talk of the day when she would dress me as a bride."

As usual, the day before the religious was the civil marriage; that curious ceremony, when a few words spoken in an upper chamber in the Hôtel de Ville, before a rather dense official, with only Monsieur Reynier and Sophie standing by as witnesses, made Roderick and Silence Jardine man and wife. The afternoon of that day, so strangely un-English and informal, was spent by them in walking up and down their favourite alley, and planting violets over the grave beside it—the mother's solitary grave. Solitary, but not sad, not even to the daughter who was leaving it, for the love remained, the love which had lasted to the end.

"And she would be glad, so glad! if she knew that you were taking care of me," said Silence, with a bright smile, though her tears were dropping down. "Also a little, that I was taking care of you. She used to say it was my *métier* always to take care of somebody. Therefore, adieu, my mother! You will not forget me, wherever you are; nor I you."

She laid her cheek on the white head-stone in a passion of sobs, then suddenly checked them all, gave her hand to her bridegroom, and suffered him to lead her away home.

He did not see her again till eleven next morning, when Sophie, Marie, and Jeanne Reynier led into the salon and left beside him, shutting the door upon them both, the whitest, loveliest vision! More like an angel than a woman, he thought then, nor ever ceased to think, though he never saw it but once in his life, on that wonderful wet morning, when the Deluge itself seemed to have come back upon Neuchâtel, as if to sweep away with its torrents all his old life, and begin the new life with his wedding-day. The rain beat in

loud storms on the window behind her, yet there she stood, this white angel, in her thin, flowing veil, like a cloud, and her crown of orange blossoms, and her downcast eyes. His own—was it possible she would be his own!—a mortal woman, and his wife?

Suddenly he stooped and kissed, not her lips, but her hand. She looked surprised for an instant, perhaps, just a little hurt, then perceived at once the deep emotion, the tender reverence.

“O my love, my love for ever! Thank God!” said she, or rather breathed than said it, as she put both her arms round his neck and clung to his bosom. She was but a woman after all.

Soon after, Roderick led his bride, both quite calm now and smiling, to the two carriages waiting below. He and she and the good Reyniers drove through the soaking streets to the damp, empty church, where, strange contrast to his sister’s brilliant marriage, they two stood alone, with not a creature of their own blood beside them, and heard the old minister in his unimpassioned voice address them, as “*mon cher frère et ma chère sœur*,” recommending them to observe “*une inviolable fidélité, une entière confiance, et une affection toujours plus profonde*.” Then, having answered the few questions of the Swiss marriage liturgy, simple and Protestant, not unlike his native Presbyterian service, the young bridegroom listened as if in a dream to the final blessing.

“Que Dieu, notre Père en Jésus-Christ, fasse reposer Sa bénédiction sur vous, qu’Il scelle dans vos cœurs le lien que vous venez de former, qu’Il le sanctifie de plus en plus, et que vous viviez ensemble en Jésus-Christ, dans l’attente du jour où ceux qui se seront aimés en Lui, seront réunis dans Son sein pour l’éternité. Amen.”

Love fixed on the love of God, and which on the very day of earthly union could look forward to the day when, their flesh being mere dust, they should be

“re-united in the bosom of God for all eternity”—ay, that was it; that was the true love. Through all the passion of his youth the young man felt this, and blessed God that he did feel it. And, as he turned and kissed his bride (to the great horror of the Demoiselles Reynier, such a thing being quite contrary to the etiquette of Neuchâtel), in spite of the gloomy church, the pelting rain, the sad, quiet marriage, neglected and unhonoured by kith and kin, it seemed as if all heaven were around and about him, for his was a true love marriage, honourable before men, and sanctified in the sight of God.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT HOME.

A “FLAT” at a Richerden terrace, furnished after the true Richerden style, not tawdry certainly, but very solid: solid and ugly. Large-patterned flowery carpets, and curtains to match, or, rather, not to match, there being just that slight difference in shade which some people think “of no consequence,” but which to others is a daily torment, setting their teeth on edge like an untidy room, or a piano out of tune, or any other of those small avoidable miseries which make all the difference between real and sham refinement. But the sense of harmony in colour and form, a thing quite independent of riches, and often attainable in comparative poverty, was mostly unknown to, and disregarded by, the wealthy inhabitants of this excellent town. No blame to them; only a little painful to those who happened to be differently constituted.

“When I look round this room, I feel exactly like a

cat with its back rubbed up the wrong way," said Roderick, trying to make a joke of his annoyance at finding the sort of "home" to which he had brought his wife, so very different from what he had desired, or even expected. They had been travelling a month abroad and had begun to weary of hotels, and look forward eagerly to the settled life of dual solitude, which to all people who are truly "one and one"—without need of that "shadowy third" which marks, alas! the sad imperfectness of married union—is, and ought to be, the most entire felicity.

And felicity it was—even though theirs had been a sad home-coming—not a soul waiting there to welcome the bride. It was now two days since they had arrived, yet not a visit, not a card, not a letter, came to show that anybody remembered there were such people in the world as Roderick Jardine and his young wife.

"We might as well be in the desert of Sahara, only then it wouldn't rain, as it seems always to do here," continued he. "What a change! We left spring, we have come back to winter."

"I don't mind it. And I like the merry crackle of the open fire," said Silence, who was kneeling before it, the blaze brightening her sweet face, upon which had already come the mysterious look which even a week of marriage seems to bring, the deep, contented calm of a girl who has passed into a woman, whose lot is settled, whose life is filled. For good or ill, God knows! but it is filled; and all uncertainty is ended. "Do not vex yourself, dear," she said. "Though, I allow, it might be a prettier salon, or parlour. Is not parlour the word?"

"Drawing-room; parlour is not half genteel enough for Richerden," said Roderick, laughing.

"Well, whatever it is, it is very comfortable. I am quite happy in it—with you. And I like our being here, all alone, with no 'receptions.' We shall not need to have any, I suppose?"

“No ‘at home,’ you mean? to receive our wedding-callers? Apparently we shall have none to receive. Oh, there is the door-bell.”

The quick, sharp stroke of a Richerden hall-bell—Roderick had started at the long familiar sound, and even changed colour a little. But it was no visitors, only the post.

“Just business—Mr. Maclagan, our lawyer. He might have written sooner, if only to apologize for finding us such a wretched ‘flat’ instead of the furnished house I ordered.” And Roderick, looking first disappointed, then vexed, was going apparently to tear up the letter, but meeting Silence’s eyes, he stopped, and passed it over to her to read. “It is such a comfort to me that I can tell you everything,” he said, tenderly. “You are sure never to be vexed, or cross, or hurt—oh, my darling!” If she had been either of the three, that last word, and the tone of it, would have healed all.

Yet the letter, read aloud, was a little hard to bear; for both.

“‘Dear sir’ (he used to call me dear Mr. Roderick; he has been our man of business these forty years). ‘Perhaps you were not aware that the furnished house you wished me to hire would have swallowed up half your income in mere rent, so I took the liberty of getting something more advisable, which I hope will please you, during the time that Blackhall is being finished. I forwarded the address, as desired, to your three sisters here, and to Mrs. Jardine in England. My wife will do herself the honour of calling on young Mrs. Jardine. I wonder how the old lady will approve of that?’”

“Of my being called Mrs. Jardine, or of Mrs. Maclagan visiting me, does he mean?” said Silence, with her smile of grave simplicity. “It is a pity for the lady to come, if she fears to displease your mother,”

added she, with a slight sigh which went to her husband's very heart.

"The 'lady' indeed!" said he, bitterly. "Oh, my mother does not know her. She does not belong to our set at all. Her calling upon my wife is quite unnecessary, rather a liberty."

"But she means it kindly; and Mr. Maclagan took a deal of trouble for us. If this—'flat,' do you call it?—is not very pretty, it is very convenient; and that is a nice bright little *bonne* he has found for us. She can quite understand me, and I can almost understand her."

"A mere 'flat,' and one servant! What would the girls say?" muttered Roderick. "Yet you are happy, my sweet!"

"Quite happy!" And her face showed this; a tell-tale face, at least to those who loved her, and loving, learned to read it.

Yet it was slightly flushed and nervous when, a few hours after, her first visitor came; the "first foot" in the new home, as that lady rather too ostentatiously pointed out. For it was Mrs. Maclagan, dressed in her very best, loud-voiced, voluble, with a shrill Richerden accent, meaning to be most cordial and most kind, and yet succeeding in making Roderick, who received her with grave politeness, and talked to her as much as possible, so as to shield his wife, wince at every sentence she uttered.

When she was gone, he threw himself in a chair.

"I hope that woman will not come again. She would drive me wild. Better have not a friend in the world than such friends as these."

"Had you many friends here? Is it I who have lost you them?" asked Silence, mournfully, and then looked sorry she had said it. "My husband, I did not mean to regret; and it is too late to suffer you to regret. We cannot alter anything now."

"We would not if we could," cried Roderick, passionately. "We know, if no other human creature does, how happy we are, how entirely we belong to one another."

"Thank God!"

There were tears in the young wife's eyes; but she smiled still. And during the somewhat trying two weeks that followed, when it rained every day, and they were shut up together indoors, with nothing particular to do—a most severe trial even to honeymoon lovers—though she did not always smile, she never once gloomed.

"I know now, I have found that blessing which my father said was the greatest any man could get, a sweet-tempered wife," cried Roderick, fondly, as they stood together at the window, watching the rain sweep down.

"Mamma was that. And papa loved her. I mean, not exactly as you love me, because he had loved some one else in his youth; she told me that herself, one day. Still he entirely respected and trusted her; they were very happy in their way. But, oh!" She suddenly turned to her husband with such a look in her eyes—a look that none but he had ever seen or would ever see. "My first love, my last love! God is good to have let me marry *you*."

"My darling!" Then, with an attempt to touch lightly upon the unspoken soreness between them, "It is well you like my company still, for, apparently, you will have no other. The weather keeps us in, for I can give you no carriage, and I hate cabs. I have never been used to them; besides, only fancy my wife in a common street cab! But weather need not have hindered all our 'carriage friends,' as my sisters call them, or my sisters either, from paying you the respect of a visit."

He spoke irritably, as he sometimes did, though never to her. A meaner nature—and there are such, men who esteem even their wives according as the

world admires them—might have visited upon Silence this entire and cruel ignoring of her. But upon Roderick it acted in precisely the opposite way. No princess quitting her own people to be received in equal honour by her husband's kith and kin, could have been treated by him with more tender reverence, more watchful love, than was that poor lonely girl, who had no other refuge or defence than himself in the wide world.

Still he was not quite perfect, and by this time she had of course found it out. But perhaps the very tenderest bit of a woman's heart comes out towards the man she loves when she first discovers she has something to pardon in him—and pardons.

"I am very cross to-day, Silence, and I know it."

"Yes, so do I," she said and smiled. "But, if you know it, it is half conquered. Go and take a good walk, and walk it off, as in the days when you were in love, you know."

"As if those days had ended, or ever would end!" answered Roderick, parting her hair and looking passionately down into her eyes. "My good angel! But don't you see how much of the devil I have in me still? How do you mean to make me good?"

"I mean us to make one another good," she answered. "My mother used to say"—it was strange and touching this way she had now of speaking of her mother, as if not dead, but only absent somewhere, and still mixed up with all their daily life—"my mother said, it is better to use one's feet or hands than one's tongue, when one is vexed about anything. Therefore go."

Roderick went, and his wife stood watching him down the rainy street with eyes he saw not, and a heart that in its deepest depths was, even to him, not wholly known—or shown.

"I think, though you had never been mine," she murmured, "so long as you were yourself, I would

have loved you just the same. But, since you are mine—oh! my love! my love!”

And the tears, which he seldom or never saw, broke out unrepresed—tears, not of grief, but joy. Soon she dried them, and, looking round for something to do, began putting away his gloves that he had left on the table, and an old coat which she had made him change for a warmer one. As she did so, she kissed them both, saying over again, with a tender murmur—“My love! my love!”

A foolish girl, may be! And she had been only married six weeks. But, as she said, it would be just the same, did he remain the same, even after they had been married fifty years. A happy love, a happy life! In which, being fitted each for each, either grows more and more into the other, through youth, middle age, old age—realizing the rare but not impossible married union, of being “not two, but one flesh.”

Roderick came back in quite a cheerful mood.

“My walk has done me good, spite of the rain. And I have actually found a friend—Tom Grierson, lately married too. He and his wife are going to the coast the day after to-morrow, but they insist upon ‘making up a party’ (that is the phrase, love) for us to-morrow. She will call first, and invite you with due ceremony. And you shall wear your wedding dress, and the diamonds Cousin Silence left to my future wife. Little she thought it would be another Silence Jardine! You will look so charming, and I shall be so proud. We must go.”

“Must we?”

With the quick intuition, the instinctive thought-reading, learnt by those who deeply love, and only those, Roderick detected at once the slight hesitation.

“Is it this?” he said with a glance at her black dress. “Do you very much dislike going?”

“I dislike nothing, if you like it, and it seems pleasant and good to you.”

"Thank you, my darling. Yes, this visit will be pleasant, I think: and good also. The Griersons are among what my family" (he rarely named his mother now) "call 'the best people in the place.' Excellent people, too; intelligent, cultivated. I like them, and so will you; old Mrs. Grierson especially."

"Do they know anything? About me, I mean."

"I cannot tell, I did not ask. You see, I could not ask," added Roderick, clouding over. But immediately he drew his wife close, and kissed her fondly. "It does not matter either way. Never mind, love. We will go—and for the rest take our chance. We have done the deed, we are married. No human being can ever part us more."

Still with a curious foreboding of what might happen, after the note of invitation and apology which, to Silence's evident relief, arrived next day, instead of Mrs. Grierson herself, Roderick helped his wife to choose her "braws" for this first appearance in the world—such a different world from the innocent *monde* of Neuchâtel! Then he left her to her toilette, and sat reading, or trying to read, till she appeared.

Not exactly the angelic vision of her marriage morning; "a spirit, yet a woman too." Very womanly, if not very fashionable, for the white dress was high round her throat, and the round soft arms gleamed under a semi-transparent cloud instead of being obtrusively bare.

"I don't know exactly what is the difference," said Roderick, examining her; "you look scarcely like the Richerden brides whom I used to meet, but you look so sweet! I once said to—to them all at home—that you were 'not beautiful,' but I am afraid, my wife, I told what we call here 'a lee.'"

Silence laughed, the happy laugh of one who, being admired by the only person she cares to please, is childishly content and satisfied.

She belonged to that class of beauties who, owing

all their charm to expression, only look well when they are happy. A disappointed life might have made her quite an ordinary girl all her days ; but now, when, leaning on her young husband's arm, she entered the Grierson's drawing-room, there was such a light in her eyes, such a tender glow in her cheeks, and about her whole bearing the quiet dignity, ease, and grace which, to natures like hers, only come with the consciousness of being loved, that very few, regarding her, would have hesitated to exclaim, "What a sweet-looking woman !"

Roderick saw the impression she made, saw indeed, for the first few delightful minutes, nothing else ; until, turning suddenly, he perceived, sitting close by, splendidly dressed, and surrounded by quite a little court, his sister Bella, Mrs. Alexander Thomson.

It was a position half painful, half ludicrous, and yet so extremely difficult, and involving so much, not only as to the present but the future, that he felt actually sick and giddy. One glance, however, at the sweet unconscious face beside him, and another at the very different face opposite, and his mind was made up.

With a bow to his sister, a mere formal bow, as to any other lady, he drew his wife's arm through his, and they passed on to the other end of the room.

Nobody noticed ; it is curious how little people do notice, or trouble themselves about their neighbours' affairs, if their too egotistical neighbours could only believe so ! Dinner was announced, the host came forward to take down the bride, Roderick had to go through the same politeness towards Mrs. Grierson, everybody went in to dinner, and soon the waves of society flowed smoothly over this little domestic tragedy, unknown to all, apparently, except the brother and sister ; who sat within a few yards of each, yet never interchanged a word.

It was a regular Richerden dinner, such as both had been familiar with from their youth upwards, but

Roderick felt like a ghost re-visiting the well-known scenes. A not unhappy ghost, certainly, in spite of Bella sitting there. Through all the dazzle of lights and clatter of voices (how loud everybody talked, and how sharp and shrill the Richerden accent sounded!) his eager ear listened for the occasional low-toned words spoken with a slight foreign intonation, and his eye rested tenderly on the fair, calm face of his wife. She was evidently neither shy nor strange, but perfectly dignified and self-possessed. He wondered if Bella saw her.

"My husband seems charmed with your wife: I shall be quite jealous directly," said his hostess. "Where did you find her? She looks different from our Richerden girls. Is she Scotch?"

"Of Scotch family, but Swiss born. We were married in Switzerland. Her father was my father's second cousin, and her name was Silence Jardine. You must have heard it before, Mrs. Grierson."

And Roderick turned to a gentle-looking old lady on his other hand, aunt to the young couple, whom he had told Silence she would be sure to like.

"I remember your father's cousin, Miss Jardine. And your wife is her name-sake? What a curious coincidence! But I understood—— However, one never hears quite the truth about love-affairs; so no matter," added the old lady, stopping herself. "All's well that ends well. Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing."

"Ours was fully six months a-doing," said Roderick, smiling. "We waited as long as possible; on account of her mother's death, and for other reasons; and then we married. A right, and wise, and prudent marriage, as I think a true love-marriage always is," he added, pointedly, for he felt his sister was listening to every word he said. And he knew that old Mrs. Grierson was one to whom everybody told everything, though even scandal, passing through the alembic of her sweet

nature, came out harmless; she was noted for never having been heard to say an ill word of anybody.

"You are right," she answered; and her eyes, placid with long and patiently-borne sorrow—she was a childless widow—rested kindly on the young bride. "By her face, I should say that Mrs. Jardine was one of those rare women who are in the world, but not of it."

"How well you read her! I thought you would," cried Roderick, warmly. "If ever there was a saintly creature born—— But I am her husband, and ought not to speak."

"Who is to speak for us if not our husbands, I should like to know?" said young Mrs. Grierson. "And when there are actually three brides present. By-the-by, Mrs. Thomson, I did not know till a few minutes ago that it was your own sister-in-law I was inviting you to meet; but I shall learn the ins and outs of Richerden people in time. You and your brother must have married within a few weeks of one another."

"No, some months," said Roderick, with his eyes firmly fixed on his plate; Bella, with some smiling word or two, turned back again to her next neighbour, with whom she had been gaily conversing all dinner-time. So the difficulty passed, seemingly unnoticed by everybody.

How much did "everybody" know? was the question that haunted Roderick. What did his sister mean by coming here, well aware whom she should meet? Was it to blind the eyes of Richerden as to their family quarrels? He knew his mother and sisters would make any sacrifice for the decent, the decorous, the expedient. Or had she come—this resplendent Mrs. Alexander Thomson, who yet wore a dissatisfied expression quite new to the rosy face of Bella Jardine—come out of curiosity, defiance, indifference, to meet the brother she had forsaken, and the sister-in-law she ignored?

When the ladies rose, and he was forced to let Silence pass him without a warning or explanatory word, catching only the bright smile which showed she was at ease and happy, because underneath this outside show was the sweet inner reality that they two were everything to one another, Roderick vexed himself with conjectures as to what was happening in the drawing-room, and blamed himself for what now seemed the moral cowardice of letting his young wife drop ignorantly into the very midst of her foes. So absorbed was he with these thoughts that he quite started when a slap on the back roused him to the presence of his new brother-in-law, Mr. Alexander Thomson.

"Didn't see you till this minute. Very odd—my wife never told me we should meet you here. And was that your wife?—the uncommon nice girl that sat beside Grierson? Phew!" with a slight whistle; then confidentially, "The women are always fools, we know. Old lady cuts up rough still? Never mind; what's the odds so long as you're happy? Glad to meet you again, my boy. When are you coming to see us?"

Had it been possible to frame a speech more calculated than another to set every nerve tingling in Roderick's frame, or touch to the quick his pride, his sensitiveness, his strong family feeling, these words of Mr. Thomson's would have accomplished it. He had forcibly to say to himself that they were well-meant, and to shut his eyes in an agony of brotherly pity to the rapidly reddening face, thickening speech, and always coarse manners of the person—you could not say gentleman—whom Bella had chosen to marry, before he could trust himself to reply. Even then it was as briefly as possible.

"Thank you. We have only just arrived at Richerden, and are going on to Blackhall as soon as possible."

"But we shall see you before you go. Bella will be delighted; and if she isn't, I shall; and I hope I'm

master in my own house. Depend upon it," dropping his hand heavily on the table, and looking round with a triumphant gleam in his fishy eyes, "the one thing a husband should try for from the very first, is to be master in his own house."

"If he can be, he will be, without need to say a word about it; and if he can't be, why, it's no good trying."

The laugh went round at this naïve remark of young Grierson's, but Roderick never said a word. And when the gentlemen fell into gentlemen's talk, politics and so on, though he liked it, having been long enough absent from England to feel an interest in all that was going on there, his mind continually wandered not only to the wife whose happiness he knew he made, and felt it was in his power to make, but to the sister who had thrown away her own happiness, and over whose lot, be it good or ill, he had no longer the smallest influence.

"Poor Bell!" he said to himself, and all his wrath against her died out; he remembered only the days when they two used to play together, merry, innocent brother and sister, sufficient to each other, without thinking of either husbands or wives.

For his wife, when Roderick, at the first excuse possible, joined the ladies, he saw her sitting in a corner, contentedly talking with old Mrs. Grierson. In the further room Mrs. Alexander Thomson, with a group of ladies round her, was holding great state, as lively and laughing as if she had not a care in the world.

Evidently the sister-in-law had not met or spoken—nor had anybody noticed the fact; or else, which was much more likely, everybody was quite aware of the fact, but was too civil, or too indifferent, to make remarks about it.

To get quietly away, that was the young husband's first thought, especially as, though she looked and smiled so sweetly, he detected a shade of weariness in

the dear face he knew so well. If he could only carry her safely off before the admiring circle round Bella broke up, and before Mr. Alexander Thomson appeared in the drawing-room—as he was sure to do in a condition euphuistically termed “merry.” But Mrs. Grierson had first to be spoken to a little, and she sat close beside his sister, whom, in passing, he felt catch his hand.

“Rody!”

Was there ever a man, old or young, who, hearing himself called by a familiar voice the pet name of his childhood, could stonily turn away? Poor Roderick, anything but stony-hearted, certainly could not.

“What do you want with me?” he whispered, pretending to turn over a large volume of photographs which his sister held.

“She—I came here on purpose to look at her—she is much nicer than I expected.”

“Thank you. Is that all? Then I will pass on. I was going to say good night to Mrs. Grierson.”

The tone, studiously polite, was exactly what he would have used to any stranger lady. It seemed to cut his sister to the heart.

“Roderick, what can I do? I dare not vex mamma. She holds all my pin-money; and he is—oh, so stingy! so—— If I had but known!”

“You did know; I told you myself,” said Roderick, sternly. “But it is useless talking. As one makes one’s bed one must lie on it.”

“I know that. And you?”

“There is no need to speak—we had better not speak—either of me or mine.”

The brother and sister looked one another full in the face. Both were changed, both had taken that momentous step which sometimes breaks the fraternal relation for ever, but as often draws it nearer, making separation, not division. Perhaps there is no tie more close and tender than that of a brother and sister both

happily married, and each taking a sympathetic interest in one another's concerns. But here——

"Stop one moment," Bella said. "Does she know I am here? Would you like me to speak to her?"

"Certainly not."

"Why not?"

"Because my wife is myself, and every rudeness, every unkindness, shown to her is the same as to myself, or more than myself. I cannot resent it, seeing it comes from my own flesh and blood, but I can escape it. And I will. There is not the slightest necessity for you to speak to Mrs. Jardine."

"Mrs. Jardine—how strange! But everything is strange," muttered Bella, almost with tears in her eyes. "However, you will come and see me—just you yourself?"

"What, without my wife? No; not even if my mother asked it. Good night, and—good-bye."

For he saw Silence's eyes watching him—those innocent eyes which he knew followed him wherever he went, with the unexactingness of perfect love. "Once," she had said to him after they were married, "once, I might have been jealous; but now—you may talk, flirt,—is not that your English word?—with any woman you please. You are *mine*—you love *me*; all else is only an outside thing."

"I must go, Bella; my wife is waiting. Again—good-bye."

"Oh, Rody!" and under shadow of the table she again caught his hand.

At this instant the gentlemen were heard coming up; and one of them, approaching, tapped her on the shoulder, with a jovial, "Well, my dear!"

A shiver of repugnance—almost of fear—passed over poor Bella from head to foot. Well might the sapient Mr. Alexander Thomson observe that "women are fools;" but the greatest of all fools is the woman that marries a fool for his money

"Jardine! here still? Do introduce us—my wife and me—to our charming sister-in-law. Or, rather, introduce her to us, if Bella thinks it more proper."

"Yes, yes! bring her here. I beg you will, and quickly. Don't you see everybody is looking at us?" said Bella, hurriedly.

"Let them look; it is nothing to me," said Roderick, and was walking away, when he felt a little hand slipped under his arm.

"I came not to hurry you, dear, but to tell you that Mrs. Grierson offers to take us home in her carriage. She is so kind. I like her so much."

"I knew you would, my darling."

Bella heard the words, saw the look, and the look which answered it. A sudden spasm, almost like despair, passed across her face—the despair which a woman, any woman, cannot but feel on catching a glimpse of the heaven she has lost or thrown away. But she righted herself speedily; and, having much of her mother's cleverness, slipped out of the difficult position by coming and taking Silence's two hands with an air of frank pleasure.

"You would not carry off my brother this very minute, when I am so delighted to see both him and you? I am Bella. Of course you have heard of Bella? Nay; you must let me kiss you, my dear."

The tone, if a little patronizing, was kind; and, though the soft cheek turned scarlet, it did not shrink from the kiss. Silence stood, neither shy, nor afraid, nor ashamed, to receive the greeting of her husband's sister. But when Bella's husband came forward, with rough exuberance, to take his share in the salute, she drew back.

"It is not our custom in Switzerland," she said in French to her husband; and, as she extended the tips of her fingers, it would have taken a bolder man than even Mr. Alexander Thomson to offer a kiss to young Mrs. Jardine.

All this little scene passed within half a minute, attracting no attention except from the Griersons, who stood by.

"We are detaining you, and making our family relations needlessly public," said Roderick; "but the fact is, my wife and sister had never met before. They will meet again shortly, I hope."

"I hope so too," responded Mrs. Grierson, in a tone which showed that the gentle old lady was fully cognizant of the Jardine history, as no doubt, in some form or other, was everybody present, or would be within ten minutes. Indeed, as Roderick took his wife from the room, he felt that, like the celebrated wit in the anecdote, they "left their characters behind them."

What matter? What did anything matter, so long as he held fast that tender hand, which, in the friendly dusk of the carriage, he had taken, for he felt it trembling much. But neither they nor Mrs. Grierson made any save the most ordinary remarks on the way home—that common-place, ugly "home," which yet was so sweet.

Arrived there, Silence threw her arms round her husband's neck.

"I am so glad, so glad!"

"Glad of what?"

"Of—everything, I think. But most of all to get home."

"What a little home-bird you will grow to! Exactly suited for a poor man's wife. Suppose, now, I had married a fashionable young lady, who wanted to have, every day, a dinner-party, like the one we have left! But you did enjoy it?"

"Oh, yes. Only—— And that was your sister? Did you know she was to be there?"

Silence spoke with hesitation, even with a slight constraint.

"I did not know, or I should not have gone," said

Roderick, decidedly. "But perhaps it is as well. Poor Bella! Did you notice her husband?"

"Yes."

Neither said anything more. Comments and questionings were alike avoided by both, as indeed was their habit on this painful subject. Already they had learned one of the best lessons of married life, that there is a time to talk, a time to be silent. No existence, least of all the double existence which was now theirs, is so entirely without difficulties—no heart so free from weak points and sore places—as not to recognize this truth. A "fidgety" man, a "worrying" woman, even though both may be good sort of folk, is often more trying to live with than an actual ill-doer. And I have known households overshadowed with endless sorrows from outside, who yet carried within them a perpetual sunshine of cheerfulness and peace.

This peace was in both their faces—the young husband and wife—as they sat down together in their little parlour, nestling into one another's arms, with the sweet and sacred caresses which even a brief separation of "doing the polite" to other folk seemed to make all the sweeter and more sacred. Neither spoke, until at last Roderick rather sighed than said, "Poor Bella!"

"Was she—was she always like that, and not like you?" asked Silence, after a long pause.

"We were never very much alike, but——"

"But you are brother and sister. I am very glad you met. And, if they wish it, you will go?"

"With you—not otherwise. But no need to talk about that. Let us talk about the dinner—a regular grand Richerden dinner, and some of the best of Richerden folk at it—the little leaven which leavens the whole lump. I like the Griersons. And you?"

"Yes; they are your friends, and this is your country; I wish to love it, and them. But I am afraid

you will never make a grand lady of me, like—like your sister.”

Heaven forbid ! Roderick was on the point of saying, but he did not. In his tender heart there was a pitiful sense of apologizing for his own people. He knew all their faults ; but they had belonged to him all his days. Kissing his wife, he said, with a smile, “ Sisters are sisters, and wives wives ; I am quite satisfied with mine.”

Then they began comparing notes about their evening’s experience, and making great fun together, like a couple of children.

“ I am so glad,” he said, “ to be married to somebody who can laugh.”

“ And I to somebody who will let me laugh. I am afraid I am in some things very unlike what old Mrs. Grierson told me you Scotch people approve of ; I do not enjoy being miserable.”

“ My darling, God forbid that I or any one should ever try to make you miserable ! ”

And the duty of the husband—as needful as the so-much-talked-of “ obedience ” of the wife—to love and to cherish, “ even as his own flesh,” the woman he has married, she who, out of mere womanhood, is certain to have in her lot much that is very hard—this solemn duty forced itself upon the young man. He resolved to bear anything, everything himself, rather than allow a hair of his wife’s head to suffer.

A boy in love, and a man who loves as perhaps only a man can love, and certainly can only love one woman,—he now saw what a world of difference there is between ! And as day by day his old, solitary, selfish life drifted fast away, till he almost forgot he had ever been a “ bachelor,” he thanked Heaven for making him, not only a happier, but, he believed, a better man, and infinitely more of a man in the truest and highest sense, for having a woman to take care of.

CHAPTER XIX.

SOCIETY.

"It never rains but it pours," said Roderick two days after, throwing over to Silence a heap of letters which had succeeded a whole pack of cards, left luckily during a day's absence, when he had been showing her some Scotch mountains, and apologizing for their not being Alps. "Here are invitations enough. The way of the world! Once met at the Griersons', all Richerden is satisfied and delighted to visit us. Even my sister; did you notice these?"

The cards of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson, and a formal dinner invitation, sufficiently proved Bella's sisterly feelings.

"We shall go?" Silence was still feeble in those auxiliary verbs which, to a native, can take such delicate shades of meaning. Her husband could hardly tell whether or not she wished to go. But he knew she ought to go, even if at some slight sacrifice to both; therefore he merely assented, without opening any discussion pro or con. She tacitly accepted his "Yes," and he went on explaining or criticizing the other invitations.

"After all, the world is exceedingly like a flock of sheep. Let one jump the ditch, the others are sure to follow. And this was a very wide ditch to jump, truly," added he, looking round the room. "We ought certainly to take a house, if only for the sake of our friends. What agony it must have cost some of them to stop their carriages in front of a flat!"

Silence laughed merrily. "And yet we are happy in it! It is ugly, I know that; but I think I have never been so happy in my life; and as for all this visiting, is it quite, quite necessary?"

Roderick was but a man, and a proud man. All the prouder perhaps from a slight consciousness of having sunk in the world—if people chose so to consider it—sunk from wealth and idleness to a small income, and what some would call the disgrace, some the dignity, of labour.

He hesitated a little; then said, gently,

“Yes, my wife, if you do not dislike it very much, I think it is quite necessary.”

“That is enough; we will go.”

“Out of mere obedience, my darling?”

“No,” she said answering his smile with a sweet gravity, “I do not think it is in me blindly to obey any one, not even you. But I honour you so much in all things I can understand that, in things I do not quite understand, I trust you. That is the only true and safe obedience.”

So they went to dinner after dinner. At Richerden the only idea of “society” consisted in dining. One invitation followed another rapidly, for it was near the end of the season, and most families were beginning to think of the periodical “going to the coast.” Yet Roderick liked it; Silence too, after a fashion. “It makes one feel,” she said once when they had come back, “in the sma’ hours,” to their quiet home, “like sitting safe in a sheltered hut, with the rain pelting outside.”

Roderick laughed. This place rather resembles a hut, certainly; but would Richerden be flattered by your likening its splendid hospitalities to ‘an even down-pour’?”

Silence coloured. “I don’t mean that. You know what I mean. Visiting is pleasant. I am glad to feel you are not ashamed of me, and oh, I am so proud of you! But still that is only our outside life. The real life is this.”

She crept close to him. She felt the beating of the strong true heart that she knew was wholly her own.

Then lifting up her face, all wet with peaceful tears, she looked earnestly at her husband. "I am so sorry, I never can tell how sorry, for the women who are *not* happy."

Whether Mrs. Alexander Thomson, with whom they had just been dining, was a happy woman or not, neither of these two discussed, nor did the lady herself betray. Either by her own will, or her husband's, Bella showed the young couple every civil attention, though more as an acquaintance than a sister-in-law. Whenever she invited them there was always a party—those large parties which are such safeguards against dangerously confidential intercourse; and she set them down to banquet upon every delicacy of the season. But, but——

There is a proverb—Roderick sometimes thought of it nowadays, and felt that he could almost understand it—"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a house full of sacrifices with strife."

Their "dinner of herbs" was growing nearer than they thought.

Roderick one day came in from a call on Mr. Mac-lagan, whose hospitalities they had also shared, and Silence, with her sweet nature and wide power of sympathy, had persisted that even Mrs. Mac-lagan was, when you came to know her, not so black as she was painted. Mr. Mac-lagan, Roderick allowed, was always liked and likeable—till now. She saw immediately that something had gone seriously wrong.

"What is it? Your mother?"

"No, dear; not my mother this time. She is well and happy in England. I may safely forget her, as she does me. It is only—oh, Silence! did you ever know what it was to owe a lot of money and not have a halfpenny to pay it with? At least, I don't mean we are at our last halfpenny, but we—that is, I—have been spending a good deal more than I ought, and Mac-lagan has just told me so, and—but this is childish

—you must not heed it, darling,” said he, trying to hide his extreme perturbation.

For a minute or two she let him hide it, or think he did—going on with her needlework as if nothing was the matter, while he took up his writing-case, and went off to the other end of the room. This could not last. She crept behind his chair, and soon he felt her arms round his neck. He caught them there, and, imprisoning the two little hands, kissed them many times.

“I don’t know how it is, I ought not to trouble you, and yet I have got into such a habit of telling you everything——”

“Is that wrong?”

“Only on your account. You are so young, my darling. I ought to bear my own burdens, and yours too. Yet now I seem too weak for either. What in the world shall I do?”

He leaned his head on his hands in deep depression. Silence came and knelt beside him. She was very young, very childish, or child-like, in many things, and hitherto her husband had treated her like a child; an idol, certainly, but still a child. Now their positions seemed reversed. He looked up at her for a moment, then laid his head on her shoulder with a sigh of relief.

“Oh, it would be such a comfort to tell you everything.”

“Do so, then.”

The “everything” was not very serious, but it seemed so to him, who had never in all his life known what it was to want anything he wished for.

“I am an idiot, I know I am, to feel so keenly the lack of a few pounds; but I never was used to this sort of thing. Maclagan asked me to show him my ‘accounts.’ Why, I never kept accounts in all my days! My mother allowed me so much a year, or half-year. I spent it, and when it was done I came to her for

more. Not that I was ever extravagant ; she knew that—but, oh, Silence ! money seems to slip through my fingers in the most marvellous way. As Maclagan told me, and I could not deny it, I no more know how to make the best of a small income than if I were a baby. Do you ? ”

He looked up in such a piteously helpless fashion that she could have smiled, had she not felt so infinitely tender over him. But it was the tenderness which is born of utmost reverence. Without any arguing, she answered simply, “ Suppose I try ; ” and began looking over the mass of papers before him, which he himself regarded with an expression almost of despair.

Poor fellow ! he had got into what women call “ a regular muddle ! ” like many another man who, neglecting or despising the small economies which result in large comforts, and regardless of the proportions of things, and the proper balance of expenditure, drifts away into endless worries, anxieties, sometimes into absolute ruin, and all for want of the clear head, the firm, careful hand, and, above all, the infinite power of taking trouble, which is essentially feminine.

Roderick watched his wife slowly untying the Gordian knot, which he, manlike, would have liked to dash his sword through.

“ What patience you have ! ” he said. “ Do throw it all aside. You must be very tired.”

“ Oh, no ; it is my business ; I ought to have undertaken it before. My mother used to say it was the man’s part to earn the money, the woman’s to use it. I can, a little. Mamma let me keep house ever since I was seventeen. I managed all her affairs. Perhaps, if you would let me try——”

“ To manage mine, and me ? ”

“ No ! ” a little indignantly. “ I am afraid I should despise the man I ‘ managed. ’ But I would like to take my fair half of the work of life. Yours is outside, mine inside. Will that do ? Is it a bargain ? ”

"My love ! yes."

"Now"—with a pretty imperiousness—"you must give me all the money you have, and all the bills you owe, and tell me exactly how much you have a year. Then take a book and read. No"—passing her hand over his forehead, which was burning hot—"go and lie down for an hour. When you wake up you shall find all right."

Poor Roderick ! he could not resist ; he was quite worn out with the irritations of the day, and that morbid anxiety peculiar to temperaments like his own, but from which he had hitherto been shielded by kindly Fate. Now Fate had turned round, and left him unshielded, except by his naturally brave heart, and that other—only a woman's. But a woman's heart with love at its core, is not exactly the weakest thing in the world.

He slept an hour, and then saw his wife standing beside him with her grave little face, and a "memorandum" in her hand, wherein their incomings and outgoings were set down with scrupulous neatness and as much accuracy as was attainable under the circumstances.

"How clever you are !" Roderick cried, enthusiastically, until he discovered the sad deficit, which must be met somehow. How ? "Perhaps the people would wait ; Richerden tradesmen often do."

"If they could, we could not," Silence answered, gravely. "They must be paid."

"How ? Not by asking my mother ; it is impossible," added he, abruptly. "And otherwise, what can I do ? 'I cannot dig ; to beg I ashamed.'"

Roderick spoke with great bitterness. His wife made no answer, but went into her bed-room and brought out a large jeweller's case—necklet, bracelet, brooch.

"It was very good of you, dear, to give me these. I know what they cost, for I have found the receipted bill ; still, if we had, not the jewels, but the money——"

Roderick drew himself up with exceeding pride. "Am I come to such a pass that I require to sell my wife's ornaments? It is a little hard." Then bursting out hotly, as she had never before seen him do—"No, Silence, you are only a girl; you don't understand the world, or you would never have suggested such a thing. Not that; anything but that."

"There is nothing but that, so far as I see," she answered, gently but firmly. "It is true I am a girl; but I am not quite ignorant of the world—at least of its troubles. Mamma and I were often very poor—so poor that we did not always have enough to eat; but we held our heads high, because we owed no one anything. She used to say, 'My child, what we cannot pay for, we will go without.' I always obeyed her. I must do so still. You must never ask me to wear these jewels."

He was so astonished that his sudden wrath melted away in a moment. The gentle creature whom he could have ruled with a word! Yet by her look, as she quietly put the ornaments back and laid the case aside, he knew she meant what she said, and that nothing would ever move her to act against her conscience.

"Do you not care for them, the gifts I gave you?" said Roderick, tenderly.

"Care for them? do I not? But I care for you still more. I would rather never wear jewels to the day of my death than see my husband look as he has looked this day."

"But to sell your ornaments! even if I can do it, which I doubt? My poor child! what would Richerden people say?"

"Would Richerden think it more discreditable that you should sell my ornaments than that your tradespeople should go without their money? Then I think the sooner we leave Richerden the better."

"Have we quarrelled, you and I?"

"I don't know," she said, half smiling.

Roderick paused a minute, and then held out his arms.

"You are right; I will do it."

"Not you, dear; these things are so much easier to women than men. Let me go to the jeweller and say——"

"That you do not like them?"

"No; for that would not be true. I like them very much—as I like all pretty things. But I like other things better—honour, peace, and a quiet mind. We will set ourselves right now, and after that we will be careful—very careful. You must earn the money, and, like Macbeth, 'leave all the rest to me;' then this will never happen again, I being so 'clever,' as you say."

The laugh in her voice, but the tears in her eyes,—who could withstand either? Not Roderick, certainly. Besides, he had the sense to see, what not all men can see, that there are things which a woman can do better than a man, in which a woman is often wise and a man foolish. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority, but merely of difference.

"I perceive," he said, "I must give you the reins, and sink into my right place in the household chariot. Well, perhaps it is best; far better than turning into a domestic Phaeton and setting the world on fire. Seriously, my darling, this shall *not* happen again, if you will help me."

So ended their first quarrel, which Silence persisted was not a quarrel, but only a slight variety in opinion. And she did help him from that time forward; in many things that might otherwise have been very painful to a proud man, very wearisome to a busy man. But she had a way of doing them all, even the most humiliating, which took the sting out of them entirely. And when the money was obtained, everybody paid, and the preparations completed for the next day's journey to Blackhall, young Mrs. Jardine sat on her boxes, which she had packed with her own hands, looking pale and

tired certainly, but with the cheerfulness of countenances. Her husband, too, went about whistling, "O Nannie, wilt thou gang wi' me?" in which song, sung under his instruction as to accent, she had created quite a *furore* at several dinner-parties.

"Evidently you do not 'sigh to leave the flaunting town,' and are anything but disgusted with the 'lowly cot and russet gown' to which I am dooming you," said he, laughing. "So give me the song; even though our piano is gone, and our parlour looks anything but that 'bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream,' to which you are so often calling my attention. Sing, my bird!"

She sat down and sang, clear as a bell and gay as a lark, the lovely old ditty. Her voice was her one perfectly beautiful possession, "except," as Roderick sometimes said, "except her soul," of which it was the exponent. He listened to it with all his heart in his eyes.

"Do you remember, Silence, that first night at the Reyniers', when you sang 'My Queen'? And again—no, you could not remember that—the first Sunday when I heard you singing behind me, unseen, in Neuchâtel Cathedral? It sounded like the voice of an angel—my good angel. And now I have her in my home, my own home, for ever! And she is—only a woman, and has got no wings."

"Nor has my angel neither! He is—only a man; and I find out a new—shall I call it peculiarity?—in him every day. And, worse, he cannot sing at all; he can only whistle; but——"

And then, being a weak-minded woman at best, and also exceedingly tired, she stopped laughing and began crying, clinging passionately to her husband's breast.

"Oh! take care of me, and I will take care of you, as well as I can. We are very young, very foolish; but we may help one another. Only love me, and then——No, whether you love me or not, I shall always love you."

“My darling!”

“But”—with the sun breaking brightly through the summer shower—“since you do love me, all will go well. We will fight the world together, and not be afraid. No”—tossing back her light curls (they were terribly unfashionable, and she had been urged to abolish them, but Roderick objected, and they remained)—“no”—and a gleam that might have come from some Highland ancestress of both, fearless till death, and faithful till death, shone in Silence’s eyes—“I am afraid of nothing, so long as I have you.”

CHAPTER XX.

FAIREST OF THE FAIR.

THEY were standing together, the young husband and wife, at “their ain door,” in the long northern twilight, the midsummer twilight, beautiful as I have never seen it anywhere but in Scotland: cold, gloomy, rainy Scotland.

But as if Nature herself wished to be kind to the souls that loved her, and unto whom the world was just a little unkind, from the day they reached Blackhall there had set in an extraordinary long spell of fair weather. Scent of roses, songs of nest-building birds, sunshiny days, and nights such as this one, when the earth lay sleeping in a pale amber light, and the far-off mountains looked like the gates of heaven;—such had been their compensations for a good many painful, troublesome, difficult things in their brief married life, and especially their life at Richerden.

Now had come to them the hallowed time, which even in happy marriage comes to few, and never comes

for very long, so fast life's cares are sure to follow. The so-called honeymoon is rarely a time of complete happiness, everything being so new and strange. But they had now had three months in which to grow used to one another, to smooth down passing differences, to find out and get over little mutual faults, to see and avoid the thorns among the roses, and to make acquaintance with what have been wittily dubbed the "two bears" of matrimony—"bear" and "forbear."

Already both were a good deal changed; the mysterious change which marriage makes to all, but to none so much as to those who marry early. Already they had learnt to forget themselves each in the other, with the hope of a long future in which to rub down opposing angles, striving to become "heirs together of the kingdom of heaven,"—that kingdom of heaven which begins on earth.

It seemed to have begun for them. Roderick's arm was round his wife's shoulders, instead of a shawl; for he had felt her shiver in the white dress which had now replaced her black one. Her head leant against his breast, her little hand had sought his, and lay safe in the soft firm clasp which was to her such a heaven of rest.

"How quiet everything is!" she said; "how plainly we can hear the burn singing down below—hear and not see—so that you cannot complain of the mill which has spoiled it so, nor grumble at the sins of your—our—misguided great-great-grandfather!"

This was an impecunious Jardine of the last century, who had sold two acres of land, half a mile below the house, on which was built a cotton-mill, now owned by Mr. Black, the factor, their only near neighbour, and the only person who had yet called upon young Mrs. Jardine. He was an old bachelor—there was no Mrs. Black to call—which fact, remembering Mrs. Maclagan, was a great consolation to Roderick, who betrayed sometimes a lurking dislike both of the mill and its master.

"Yes, Blackhall is very quiet," he answered, "especially after Richerden. You don't regret Richerden, though you are 'no longer dressed in——' How does the line run?"

Silence sang out into the clear still night—no fear of listeners!—the verse—

"No longer dressed in silken sheen,
No longer decked wi' jewels rare,
Dost thou regret the courtly scene
Where thou wert fairest of the fair?"

"Those 'jewels rare' about which I got so angry with you, my darling; and yet which purchased for us so much peace of mind, to say nothing of Mr. Mac-lagan's declaration 'that he had not met for years a lady he so much respected as young Mrs. Jardine!' Good, honest man! He never said so, but I think my poor opals will appear on Mrs. Mac-lagan's fat neck next winter."

"Never mind; they will make her happy; and I—my happiness does not lie in ornaments."

"What does it lie in, then?"

"Love."

He knew the whispered answer, without need of her giving it. Still, as he pressed his wife closer to him, he liked to hear it.

"Love is not everything perhaps. I mean—as our good friend Mac-lagan suggested when we bade him good-bye—

'Will the flame that you're so rich in light a fire in the kitchen,
Or the little God of Love turn the spit, spit, spit?'

We must be prudent. And we shall be, now the wife is Chancellor of the Exchequer. Still we may have a good deal to fight against, which even love will not shield us from. But, after all, 'Love is best!'"

"Is it? Do you really think so? For me it is; but you——" she stopped.

Silence was, as her husband often told her, "a very

woman." Until her marriage she had been, as she sometimes owned, smiling, utterly ignorant of men and their crotchets; their ambitions, lawful and unlawful, their faults and virtues, both larger, maybe, than ours. Such knowledge, in short, which, whether for good or ill, no unmarried woman can possibly acquire. But this young wife was learning it day by day.

Slowly she began to feel—and in her large heart, wholly absorbed in her husband, to feel without pain—that to a man love is not all, nor ought to be. His life, meant to stretch far outside the home, should be sheltered, but not shut up within it; else it will assuredly wither at the root, like a tree which has neither air to breathe nor room to grow in. And sometimes, though he never said it, never hinted that his marriage had cost him anything, there came a certain dulness over Roderick's face—the wistful dreariness of a man who has nothing to do, no special aim or ambition in life, which told its own tale.

—Told just so much, no more. And Silence, being a practical rather than a sentimental woman, had made for herself no unnecessary misery out of it. She knew her husband too well to imagine he counted as sacrifices the small, selfish, personal luxuries in which young men indulge, and which he had to give up in marrying. Doubtless he had liked them well enough, but they were not necessary to him, for the very refinement of his nature gave it a simplicity almost ascetic. Frugal as their table was, he ate what was set before him without complaining; and day after day he took long walks across country, without ever hinting that never in his life before had he been without his great enjoyment—a good horse to ride.

No, these were not the things he missed, and his wife knew it. But he missed work, and—just a very little—society. Also, there was one pang, not always there (for deceive ourselves as we may, we parents, our children can be happy without us!), still a sore pang

whenever it did come—the total silence of his own people towards him. Since—except that one state dinner, and the call afterwards, when Mrs. Alexander Thomson was “not at home”—even Bella had been too indifferent, or too cowardly, to make any further sisterly sign. The acquaintance had tacitly dropped.

“We are just ourselves—our own two selves,” said Roderick, answering his wife’s words, and perhaps the unspoken thoughts of both. “We shall have to fight the world together, and alone; but we will do it, never fear. You shall help me, and I will help you—if I can. By the way—if one dare name such a thing in face of those glorious hills—did your new kitchen-range work well to-day?”

She laughed merrily.

“Yes, everything is beginning to work well; after a good deal of trouble.”

“I know that, my darling. Anybody less happy-minded than you would have made a mountain of misery out of the chaos I have brought you into. Poor Cousin Silence! Blackhall could not have been thus in her lifetime; she was very dainty and orderly, I believe; but she has been dead nearly two years now.”

“Dear Cousin Silence!”—with a sudden pathos in her voice which struck her husband. “I think a good deal of Cousin Silence. It seems so strange that we should be here—and so happy—we two. Did you know, Roderick, that this was her favourite walk—this terrace—hers and Cousin Henry’s?”

“Cousin Henry—that must have been my father?”

“Yes, my father always called him so. He used to speak of him sometimes, not very often. I have never told you”—here her voice fell into the tenderest whisper—“but I have sometimes thought, if they all knew it, they would be very glad that we two were married. Because, as I found out by some letters I had to look over after mamma died, Cousin Silence ought to have

married Cousin Henry, if my father had not come between them in some cruel way. He was very sorry afterwards—poor papa! but it was too late, I suppose. And they are all dead now, and we are here. Is it not strange?”

“Very strange. Poor Cousin Silence!”—Then, with a sudden and inexplicable revulsion of feeling, Roderick added—“We will not talk of this any more. You see, I am my mother’s son. She loved him dearly, and he was the kindest of husbands to her—my poor father!”

“And so was papa to mamma. But oh, Roderick!”—and, clinging to him with a sudden passionate impulse, she burst into tears—“love is best—love is best! O my God, I thank Thee! Take what Thou wilt from me, but leave me this; let me never live to hear my husband say that love was *not* best!”

Roderick soothed and quieted her. She had been very tired that day, working, as he declared, “like a nigger slave,” over her domestic affairs. Then they sat down together, still under the starlight—it was impossible to go indoors that lovely night—and began talking of the future, planning out their life, the long sweet life they were to pass together. Full of work—of hard work, maybe—but work, each for each, and, after that, for the outside world; in which the young man owned he should like dearly to play a man’s part, somehow, in some way, so as to leave the world a little better than he found it. Nothing strange in this, nothing new, and yet it seemed all deliciously new to these two young people, and especially to the wife, who thought her husband capable of everything great or noble.

“That may be all very true,” said Roderick, laughing. “Let us suppose that I could be a king or an emperor, if I tried, and if anybody asked me. But no fear of that. No doubt it is foolish to complain of having nothing to do, when there is endless work

to be done in the world—only, how am I to find it?”

“That is what puzzles me too,” answered Silence. And her husband laughed at the grave judge-of-session expression of her face, as he saw it in the wonderfully clear glimmer of the zodiacal light. “You have been brought up to no profession, no business, though you are growing more business-like every day. It is useless trying for any appointment, for we have got no friends—no grand friends, that is, with influence to help us. Besides, that would entail our quitting Blackhall—and you want to live at Blackhall—and we have decided that we can do it if——”

“If you will take care of all the money, and spend it carefully; sending me about the world with a pound-note in my pocket, which I have the strictest injunctions never to change——”

“Roderick!” They were such innocent, merry children still.

Very soon “young Mrs. Jardine,” as he was fond of calling her, put on her wise face again, and both it and her words often had a curious wisdom—not worldly wisdom, but that wisdom which has been characterized as coming “from God”—“first pure, and then peaceable.”

“There is a saying, Roderick—you read it out of the Bible this very morning at prayers—‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.’ That means, as it seems to me, at least, do not go beating about the bush, and vexing yourself with trying after a hundred things that you cannot do, but do something which you can do. I have been thinking of you a great deal, my husband, and one thing has occurred to me. You are very clever; you know you gave me a whole heap of MSS.—prose and poetry—which you wrote at college.”

“When I was so foolish as to think I should be an author some day.”

“Well, why not? All other professions cost oceans

of money and years of labour. Authorship cost nothing but pen, ink, and paper."

"And a few brains, which you think I have, my wife, but—query?"

She looked up with tender admiration at the handsome face, thoroughly manly, and yet with a strange feminine sweetness such as is often supposed to imply that mysterious quality called genius. He might have had it in degree, or else, more likely, his nature belonged to the border-land of the appreciative rather than the creative—still his wife believed in him, wholly, utterly.

"I would give my life to see my husband a great man, and to help him to become one!" said she, with a suppressed passion which quite startled Roderick. Then, laughing again, as if half ashamed of her own earnestness, "Suppose, since we cannot afford to buy books, you were to set to work to write one?"

"You little Solon!" cried Roderick, and said no more.

But there was a gleam in his eye, a hope in his heart. Something in his wife's words had stirred in him that ambition which every man has, or ought to have, else he is no true man at all—the wish to do something, to be something; to cease drifting aimlessly down the stream of life, in the passing pleasures of the day, but to take firm root somewhere; strike root downwards, and bear fruit upwards. And the woman that hinders him from doing this is no true wife, but a mere parasite that smothers and impedes the growth of the tree. Ay, even though she may garland him as gorgeously as the lianas do the trees in western forests, with what she calls love, but which is in truth the merest selfishness.

Such was not—never could have been—the love of Silence Jardine.

From that night, when, calling her "a little Solon," he said no more, but sat beside her, looking across at

the dim mountains and amber sky, and thinking his own thoughts—uncommunicated, perhaps uncommunicable—Roderick began in good earnest the work she had suggested. It involved his shutting himself up many hours daily, and being so absorbed when he did appear—after the fashion of young writers before they learn that true authorship is a duty, not a passion—a daily labour, and not an accidental “mood”—that sometimes he had hardly a word to say to her, and she scarcely knew whether to smile at, or stand in awe of, his silence and abstraction.

He had his weak points, no doubt, this lovable and well-loved Roderick; perhaps his wife saw them, perhaps she did not. And she had hers, which doubtless he had also found out by this time. But as she sometimes said in the gravely simple way she had of putting things—the great secret of domestic life is to be able to recognize, first, our own incapacities, and next, the incapacities of those dear to us, so as to conquer the one, and be happy with, even in spite of, the other.

And they were happy, no doubt of that, for their happiness lay in the safe strength of satisfied affection, which, like the key-note of a tune, settled the music of their life, guiding its perplexed measure into one harmonious end.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.

As months went on, the great problem of making ends meet to the young husband and wife gradually became more difficult. Silence, brought up in that best school, poverty—when not actually grinding poverty—had started their small *ménage* on the safe principle of paying for everything at once, and buying nothing that she could not pay for. But the differences between Swiss house-keeping and Scotch were considerable; she often found herself at fault. She had to learn her lesson all afresh, and sometimes it was rather a hard one. At first she brought all her difficulties and distresses to her husband; he listened with his usual sweet patience, but she soon found that he did not understand, or was grieved and troubled; so, by degrees, she took all these domestic burdens on herself alone. “It is easy for me to bear them,” she argued; “but he——”

And then he was writing a book! She who, without being literary, had lived in an atmosphere of literature, at least of book-loving people, looked on him with a tender awe, and kept from him everything that could annoy him or hinder his important work; going quietly about her own, which she thought so inferior, yet which in her secret heart—despise her not, ye learned ladies! she was woman enough not merely to do, but to enjoy doing.

To some wives, and not the worst of them, half the pleasure of marriage is to be mistress of a house! The faculty of arrangement—of touching with that wonderful rod of the fairy Order all the confused elements of domestic life, and converting them into smoothness

and peace ; the power of government, as essential in a family as in a state, of setting all the wheels working, and taking care that they are well oiled, so that the machinery is kept going ; pleasing the eye and soothing the heart with a sense of comfort and of the fitness of things ; all these qualities Silence possessed in a very large measure. And to use what one possesses, to have occasion for doing what one feels one can do well, is a pleasant thing to all women.

She was a born mistress of a household, this young Mrs. Jardine ; none the less so because of a something in her beyond it all, which made her often stop a moment in her daily labours to look at “ the blue hills far away,” to listen to the singing of the burn in the glen, or the birds in the garden, and perhaps carol a ditty herself there, when she was gathering flowers or pulling fruit, out in the open air, for they had no piano, and she would not hear of buying one till the book was done and they had plenty of money.

Plenty of money—out of a first book, by a “ prentice han’ ! ”—they must have been most innocent and ignorant souls to believe this ! Yet they did. That MS. was a novel, of course—but, owing to the author’s small experience of life and the difficulty he found in painting nature, thrown back out of nature into the far past, into that classic time which the young collegian, who was a good Greek scholar, fancied would be as interesting to others as it was to himself. He discussed it incessantly, in that sweet companionship which was a reflection of himself, till he almost felt like a modern Pericles inspired by a nobler, holier, and purer Aspasia.

And she—she smiled and listened ; not always thinking everything perfect because Roderick did it, but still much inclined that way, and in any doubtful case giving him the benefit of the doubt. Between whiles she did her own work, as he his, so conscientiously that very often they scarcely saw one another

all day long. But then came the blessed evenings together, which healed all the day's worries and cares. They walked out when the weather was possible, and then when the inevitable rain came on they nestled down by the welcome fire—made more delicious, perhaps, by the beating of the storm outside.

"Yes, I think I rather like the rain," said Silence once as they were sitting "four feet on a fender," the lamp between them, and she was putting a stitch or two into his coat—alas! his clothes began to need mending a little, he that had been "the glass of fashion and the mould of form;" but he scarcely noticed it, being absorbed in other things. "You know, dear, we were winter lovers, and half our courtship was done in snow and rain. I shall always love the rain."

"My darling, you are in one thing unlike all women—at least, all that I ever knew. You invariably prefer what you have instead of what you have not. Suppose, now, just for a change, you were to begin worrying my life out because I cannot give you half a dozen servants and a carriage and pair, or take you out into society? My wife, do you mind being poor?"

"Do you? When you are a Jardine—we are both Jardines for that matter—and you are to be a great author, or a great man, some day?"

"Evidently my wife does not believe the two synonymous," said Roderick, laughing and colouring.

"Not quite, because the author may fail; whereas the man who does his work—any work—as conscientiously as you are doing it, must always be, in one sense, a great man. Also the one is the world's property, the other is mine!"

She put her arms round his neck; he leant against her, for he was, in truth, a good deal tired. His book had been "bothering" him, and he was not used to being bothered, not accustomed to the endless labour, the perpetual struggle between impulse and persever-

ance, moods of errant fancy and deliberate, mechanical, matter-of-fact toil, which all professional authors understand but too well.

He might or might not have been a genius; he certainly did not think himself one, poor Roderick! being always painfully alive to his own shortcomings; but all the more it comforted him that his wife did think so, and had the faith in him which he had not always in himself. Human nature may be weak, but there is often a pathos in its weakness; and few laments have been more touching than that of the Prophet Mohammed, whom even the young, fair, second wife could not console for the loss of his old Cadiga. "Ah, but it was Cadiga who *believed in me*."

That Silence Jardine believed in her Roderick might have been a mistake, even a folly; but she did believe, and it made her happy. Through all their weariness, solitude, and poverty—not actual need, but still hearing sometimes the distant bark of the "wolf" that might soon come to their door—the young husband and wife were, nevertheless, thoroughly happy. All people might not have been so—not even married people, who took their standpoint in external things, thought a great deal of "What will the world say?" or delighted in material pleasures not obtainable at Blackhall. But it had been a just criticism passed by old Mrs. Grierson on Roderick's young wife, that she was "in the world, and not of it;" therefore she was happy, and she made him happy too.

"It's done at last!" said he, almost with a shout, as, one late autumn morning, with the scent of clematis and jasmine coming in at the open window, he finished his book, writing, in his best and neatest hand, "The End" on the final page. "And yet I am half sorry! I have killed them all, or married them—made them quite comfortable, anyhow—and now I rather miss them. They had grown such companions; had they not, dear?"

Silence smiled ; but yet, as she tenderly tied up the MS., carefully counting the pages, to be sure that none were missing, a tear fell on the last one. It was so dear to her, this first work of her husband's, done in their first year of married life, and full of so many associations. She was sure, even if it came to the twentieth edition, she should never cease to remember and cherish it, every line.

"Twentieth editions do not come every day, even to celebrated authors," said Roderick, sapiently. "I should be glad to sell even the first five, and get the money."

"Money—I am afraid I had forgotten the money," said Silence—as, indeed, she had.

But for a good many days after, when, the excitement of work over, a re-action came, and Roderick looked more pale and ill than she had ever seen him, she began to count over her little store, as if by counting she could double it, and to long, day by day, for the letter which was to bring the hope of that despised necessity—pounds, shillings, and pence.

Celebrated authors are usually treated with courtesy and kindness by eminent publishers, well aware that—

"the value of a thing
Is just as much as it will bring,"

but unknown and amateur authors who rashly send their MSS. to busy firms, unto whom their small venture is a mere drop in the bucket, an unconsidered nothing, received and laid indefinitely aside, do not always meet the same consideration.

Day after day Roderick and Silence stood together at their gate—somehow, without planning, it always did happen that they met together there, at the precise hour when the postman might be seen slowly winding up the long road ; but in vain. He seldom left them any letters : never the letter which would have been such a priceless boon.

Roderick wrote a second time ;—a third time Silence hinted at ; but he shook his head.

“I am a proud man ; I would as lief be the unjust judge as the woman who, by her continual coming, wearied him into justice. What a strange, sad world it is, my darling !”

And then by degrees he fell into that deep depression so much commoner to men than to women, in which women often have to stand by, quite powerless, thankful only if there still remains, untouched, that sweet nature, that pathetic appeal for sympathy, which was in Roderick’s eyes when he said “my darling.”

But this could not last ; he would have been more than human else—or less. A young man in his prime, with strong ambitions, high aspirations—all, in fact, that makes the difference between the man who wishes really to live, for this world and the next, and the man who is content to feel, or act as if he felt, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,”—for such a man to be shut up in a narrow Eden, even with his beloved Eve by his side—it could not be !

And, in one sense, it ought not to be. When at last he grew irritable, and Silence had to recognize the fact that women have a good deal to bear, not only for, but from, those whom they deeply love—still she did not blame him ; how could she ? “It is so much harder for him than for me,” she argued ; and perhaps it was.

“I try to be good—I do try !” he would sometimes say with an almost childlike pathos, after he had been “cross” with her. “Believe me, I am more vexed with myself than ever you can be with me. Now you—nothing ever seems to vex you.”

“That’s all you know,” she answered, gaily. “I may turn out to be ‘a goodly villain with a smiling cheek,’ as your Shakspeare has it.”

“Smiling, but just a little too pale, my ‘villain,’”

said Roderick, stroking it tenderly. And they kissed and forgave one another.

It is not true, as some special pleaders for sinners try to make out, that the more one forgives the better one loves; but it is true that the strongest rivet in the fabric of domestic love is mutual forgiveness, when followed by mutual amendment. These sore weeks of suspense, which tried them both so much, haply taught these young people a few lessons, which they would never forget for the remainder of their lives.

The last and hardest came one day when they had been rather brighter than usual. Silence had persuaded her husband to walk down with her to the obnoxious cotton-mill, in which she had become much interested—having instituted, or rather carried on anew, a school for the mill girls, which had been the favourite work of Miss Jardine. “You will let me do it, just because she did it?” was the entreaty which Roderick could not resist. So every Sunday, while he took the long stretch across country which she insisted upon after the labours of the week, she had gone down to an empty room at the mill and kept school there for two hours.

To-day the girls recognized her with delight, and her husband, pleased with her pleasure, glad too of any relief in his monotonous life, had talked to the “hands,” examined the machinery, and acknowledged that there might be a worse lot in life than to be master of a mill.

“At one time I wanted to be an engineer, but my mother thought the profession not ‘genteel’ enough. She would have put me into ‘the house,’ but, though I loved machinery, I hated trade. You would not have wondered, had you ever known my grandfather Paterson——” Roderick stopped. “But he is dead—and he was a clever man, and an honest, in his own way.”

It was one of the things which Silence most loved

in her husband, part of the infinite respect deepening every day, which would have made her pass over ever so many little faults in him, that she never heard him speak ill-naturedly or unkindly of any human being.

"I almost wish I had been in our firm, or some other, that you might—

‘walk in silk attire,
And siller ha’e to spare.’

But after all, my wife, you would not have cared to see me a millionaire, and a money-grubber;—Grub Street seems a deal nearer my mark."

They both laughed and entered the house gaily—almost for the first time without looking on the hall-table for the vague expectation of something. It was not till Silence had taken off her hat and begun to make the tea that she saw a large carrier's parcel with the "eminent publisher's" label outside—one of those neatly done up, innocent-looking parcels which often carry with them a stroke of absolute doom.

"Let me open it," said Silence—and her husband let her.

It was a civil note, a very civil note, placed on the top of the MS., and expressing great regret that the latter was found "unsuitable." In reading it Roderick's hands shook nervously, and his colour went and came.

"Never mind, it does not matter; it was what I should have expected," was all he said.

"No, it does not matter," said Silence, firmly. "They only say it is 'unsuitable' to them. It may suit some one else. Let us try."

"Yes, let us try," echoed Roderick, mechanically, his hand before his eyes. "And if we fail——"

"‘We fail;
But screw our courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail.’"

"My Lady Macbeth!" said he, scarcely able to for-

bear a smile at the sweet broken English, and the brave heart which tried so hard to keep up his own. "Then let us once more go together to 'murder sleep'—or only a publisher. Whom shall the MS. be sent to next?"

What endless power of re-action, what unconquerable hope there is in youth! We elders often look back on our own, wondering at the daring ignorance that could breast such unknown monster waves, or fancy we could ride in our little cock-boats over seas where many a good ship has gone hopelessly down. Yet so it was, and so it always will be.

That very day—for Silence never let any grass grow under her feet—she repacked the MS. and sent it to another house; from whence it came back at once; unopened, as all arrangements were made up—in fact, the head of the firm was just starting for Switzerland. He, honest man—for publishers are but men, though poor authors will not always believe it—being perhaps a little worn out with a year of worries—the *genus irritabile* are the most worrying folk alive!—added a well-meant but quite unnecessary sting to the effect that "he would advise the author to try another tack—historical novels never sold."

"Then I had better burn it," said Roderick, quietly. But as he advanced to the fire there was an expression in his face which his wife had never seen before. She flung herself before him in an agony of tears.

"You shall not. It is mine, mine, whether the world likes it or not. We will never give in; we will try and try again. Don't you remember Bruce and the spider?"

"A good simile; because in the mean time I might lie in this horrid cave and starve. Thank you, my dear. No, I had rather go out, take my sword in my hand, and die fighting, die fighting!"

He laughed loudly; and then, utterly breaking down, he too burst into tears.

"I am ashamed of myself," he said at last. "But you do not know, no woman could know, how terrible this sort of life is to a man. To sit with my hands bound, and watch the tide come in, wave after wave—the tide that will drown us both. Oh, if I could go anywhere—do anything! But I can do nothing—I was brought up to nothing. If I had ten sons"—he spoke wildly, nor noticed the sudden flush of the down-cast face—"ay, and a fortune for each of them, I would still bring them up to earn their honest bread. Mother, mother, you have been very cruel to me!"

It was months since he had named his mother or any of his family. By common consent he and she had kept silence, even between one another, on this point, and they did so still.

Without any words, Silence laid her husband's head on her shoulder, soothing him less like a wife than a mother—or rather a combination of both. The worshipped ideal, the "queen" of boyish fancy, had long ago melted into the mere woman—not perfect, but yet trying hard to be "as good as she could," both for love's sake and for the sake of that Love Divine which is at the root of it all. And so she was gradually becoming what a man so sorely needs his wife to be—comfort, solace, strength; his fellow-labourer as well as his counsellor; neither superior nor inferior to himself, only different.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WOLF AT BAY.

Not that day, but the next, Silence made the wisest suggestion that could have been made—that they should accept the latest of the many invitations of good old Mrs. Grierson, and visit her—not at Richerden, but at the coast.

“You know she said all the Richerden people will have left by now,” added Silence, hesitating.

“That means, we need not fear meeting any of our relations or friends—we tabooed folk,” answered Roderick, bitterly. Nevertheless, in his present condition, the very thought of change had a certain relief in it. “She is a dear soul—old Mrs. Grierson. I told you you would like her, and you did.”

“Very much.”

“Suppose then we were to strain a point and go!”

Silence did not tell him that straining a point was, as regarded money matters, more difficult than he knew; but she did somehow manage it, and they went. Not, however, until, after many consultations, the luckless MS. had again gone forth on its quest for a publisher; this time almost without hope, but simply in the carrying out of that “dogged determination” which Roderick declared he now for the first time recognized in his wife.

“If I had had it!” he said wistfully, as they sat together on the deck of one of those river steam-boats where all the *désagréments* of over-crowding and holiday-making cannot neutralize the pleasure of sea and sky, mountain and loch. “If I had had it, how much more I might have done!”

“You never know you have not got it till you try.”

“My dear heart!” In the sanctity of very private life Roderick sometimes called his wife “my heart,” or “my soul”—which was a great deal nearer the truth than many an idle pet name.

“Oh, this is delicious!” said he, as he drank in the salt air and amused himself with Silence’s delight in a beauty which she declared made Scotland “better than Switzerland,” the broad estuary running up into long hill-encircled lochs, where porpoises tumbled and white gulls wheeled screaming overhead, and the lights and shadows came and went, producing “effects” such as are seen nowhere but in this rainy, sunshiny land; a country which beyond all others seems to be a country with a soul, especially on its coast.

She, who, though brought up among mountains, had never seen the sea except when she crossed it at Calais, watched all these wonders with perfectly childish delight.

“How happy you are!” said Roderick, looking at her.

“Why not? when we two are together—always together.”

Roderick smiled, not in gratified vanity, he had very little of that; but recognizing—as in selfish passion men never can recognize—the sweetness of being able to make another human being perfectly happy.

Mrs. Grierson’s welcome was a treat to get. She was one of those old people whom all young people love—sympathetic, unexacting, expending wherever she could, and especially upon any one that needed it, the warmth of her childless, motherless heart. Narrow she might be in her opinions—at least, some of the new generation, even Roderick himself, had thought so; but in her acts she was wide as charity itself.

And her house was one of those—not too many in this world—where guests feel entirely “at home.” Not from its luxuries, though these were enough to make Roderick sometimes say mournfully, “I wish, my

darling, I could give you such-and-such things at Black-hall!" but from the spirit of kindness and peace that pervaded it all. One always found everything done that one wanted, and nothing that one did not want. Nobody ever attempted to "amuse" you, and yet you were never neglected, never allowed to feel that under the polite smile was the secret wish, "I wonder when they are going away!"

The young folks were left almost entirely to themselves, sitting out on the lovely shore, or climbing the heights—the same where Roderick had a year ago sat and dreamed of the then unseen and incredible She—as he told her once when she sat beside him. They wandered about perfectly content, till dusk, when they came in, and submitted placidly to the sweet severities of late dinner. Mrs. Grierson belonged to one of the "old" Richerden families, and cherished the refined formality vainly imitated by the *nouveaux riches* of that society.

"But you seem quite at home," said Roderick to his wife. "You might have been a Richerden lady all your days, so well you play your part."

"I don't play it at all, dear. I really enjoy myself—I enjoy everything—with you. How terrible it must be"—with a sudden shiver—"I hardly know which would be most terrible, having to part from one's husband, or parting, conscious that one was not sorry to part. Now, you and I are not always 'good,' my Roderick. Sometimes we vex one another—I don't believe a bit in your Dunmow flitch of bacon! Why, we have not been married six months, and I am sure we have quarrelled at least twelve times."

"Not quarrelled, only differed," answered he, laughing. "And, I suppose, all people do differ, and yet love one another to the end. You love me still?"

"Yes,"—with a sudden gravity—"because I respect you. I think there is one only thing which could kill my love—if I ceased to respect you. I should do my

duty still, but all love would go dead out, like a fire when one tramples on it. And then, I think, no power on earth could ever light it up again."

"God forbid!" Roderick said, startled by a kind of sad sternness which came into the gentle face. But it did him good, after all, to feel that there was that in his wife which would never suffer any man to make her into either a plaything or a slave. The next minute she had slipped her hand into his.

"Don't let us talk such nonsense, my Roderick; you will always love me, and hold me fast. I can bear anything so long as you hold me fast."

He did hold her fast, and through more trials than she guessed. To his sensitive nature, the continual dread of meeting Richerden people—old acquaintances who might speak to him or her of painful things—became a perfect bugbear. And though Mrs. Grierson, with her usual delicate tact, had managed to let him understand that his own family had all returned to town—that is, Richerden—for the winter, still he caught himself looking into every carriage that passed along the one beautiful sea-side road, every steamer that stopped at the now half deserted quay, with a nervous anxiety lest he should see some familiar face; familiar still, but welcome no more.

Suppose he did meet them—he only said "them" without individualizing—what should he do? Would nature and instinct triumph over reason, so that he could not ignore them, his own flesh and blood, look and pass by, as if they were common strangers? And once Silence, who, after a time, began to divine his unspoken thoughts, brought him face to face with them by a sudden question, put with a tender anxiety, but very earnestly.

"Roderick, I have often wanted to ask—what should you do if you were to meet your mother?"

"If *we* were to meet her, you mean; for we are never apart."

In truth he took care that he and his wife never should be apart, lest somebody or something should chance to wound her, the defenceless creature whom every day he felt more bound to cherish, and concerning whom his indignation continually higher rose. A "tragedy in a tea-pot" may be, but none the less a tragedy; a shadow that was always coming between them and the sun; and worse here, after a little, when the first pleasantness of the change had worn off—worse certainly than at Blackhall.

By-and-by, he spoke of going back to Blackhall, but good Mrs. Grierson entreated they would stay on a little longer.

"It would do your wife good, and me too," she said. "Remember I have no daughter, and she no mother."

"That is true, poor child!" And he looked across to where, in sweet unconscious peace, Silence sat, making with her deft fingers a cap for the old lady.

"Why call her 'poor'?" Pardon me, my dear Roderick, but may I ask one question—has your mother ever seen your wife?"

"No."

"She ought to see her. Do you not think so?"

"What do you mean, Mrs. Grierson? But, excuse me, this is a subject upon which we had better not speak."

"I agree with you, and should never have spoken," said the old lady, nervously, "were it not almost my duty to tell you that Mrs. Jardine is at Fairfield, close by, come unexpectedly on a three-days' visit. She may not come to see me, and she may. If she does——"

"We will leave immediately," said Roderick, rising. "Indeed, my dear Mrs. Grierson, it is much better so. We should grieve to cause you a moment's inconvenience."

"My dear," laying her hand on his arm, and looking at him with sweet calm eyes that were so near the other world as to have half forgotten the sorrows of

this. "My dear, I knew you as soon as you were born. Forgive an old woman who never had a child; but mothers are mothers—don't you think that, instead of going away, you should rather stay, on the chance of seeing your mother?"

"See my mother? what, she—But, indeed, I cannot talk over these things, which, I suppose, you know all about. Everybody does know everybody else's affairs in Richerden."

"Yes, I know."

"Then it is kind of you not to have spoken to me before. Let us continue that wholesome silence. Let me take my wife and go."

"Suppose your wife and I were to settle that question. She is the dearest little woman in all the world. I only wish I had her for my daughter. Women understand women best," she added, with a gentle smile. "I think, my dear boy, you had better walk away."

Roderick did not walk away, but he suffered Mrs. Grierson to go over and speak to his wife. Finally, the ice once broken, they were able to talk over these painful things all three together. The younger ones poured out their grief and wrath; at least Roderick did; Silence said nothing. The elder woman listened patiently and tenderly, yet took a little the opposite side, for there are two sides to every subject, and those are the wisest people who in youth can see with old—in age with young eyes.

Deep as her sympathy was, seventy views things a little differently from twenty-seven. The warm motherly heart could not choose but put itself in the mother's place—the mother who had so wholly lost, or persuaded herself that she had lost, her beloved and only son.

"I have known Mrs. Jardine ever since her marriage," Mrs. Grierson explained to Silence. "She is a woman of strong prejudices, strong passions, but generous and kindly; doing wrong things sometimes, as we all do, but doing them with the best intentions,

which not all of us do. But I beg your husband's pardon for criticizing his mother, who is so totally opposite to his wife that, on the principle that extremes meet, I should not wonder if, when you do meet, you were to like one another amazingly."

Roderick made no answer; but, whether he believed it or not, the idea certainly seemed to comfort him. He listened with a patience that surprised himself to a further homily and many gentle arguments; ending with one which youth is so slow to understand, that life is too short for anything but love and peace.

Yielding, at last, to her earnest entreaty, and to the mute appeal of his wife's eyes, Roderick consented that Mrs. Grierson should write a brief note to his mother, mentioning formally what guests she had in her house, and how happy she should be to see Mrs. Jardine, "were it convenient and agreeable."

The next six hours, spent within doors—they shrank from the chances of the road without—were not very happy hours to any of the trio.

It was nearly night—a red stormy sunset fading over the sea, the "white horses" rising, a gale beginning to blow and dash the waves wildly against the rocks under the drawing-room windows. Roderick and Silence had been watching the twilight shadows upon the mountains, beyond which lay Blackhall and home.

"I almost wish we were at home," she whispered; and he had put his arms tenderly round her, when suddenly Mrs. Grierson entered with a letter in her hand.

"Read that, my dears. It is, I own, rather—surprising."

It was—from a mother. "Mrs. Jardine's compliments to Mrs. Grierson, and she does not intend going out to-day; but if Mr. Roderick Jardine has anything to say to her he may come, provided he comes alone, at ten o'clock to-morrow."

These brief lines were passed round, and then the three regarded one another; doubtful who should speak first, and still more doubtful what to say.

At last Roderick, pressing his hostess's hand, bade her not to be troubled. She had done her best. "But you see, dear Mrs. Grierson, that I was right. We had better go home."

"And not go and see your mother?"

"Certainly not; without my wife. Dear," turning to her affectionately, "we did not have it in our Swiss marriage service, though, I believe, it is in the English one; but there is a text—'What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' I do not mean to be put asunder from my wife—not even by my own mother."

He spoke smilingly, caressing her the while, but Silence burst into tears.

"And it is I that have been the cause of this—I, who——Does she know, Roderick, that my mother is dead? And would any one whose mother is dead wish to keep a son away from his living mother? Go to her, with or without me—only go?"

And, argue as he might, she refused to see the matter in any other light. A mother was a mother always. Mrs. Jardine had wished to see him, and he must go.

Roderick thought differently. To him it appeared the most arrant cowardice; desertion of the wife he had deliberately chosen; acknowledgment of an error he had never committed. Besides, it was a weak truckling to the stronger side—the wealthy side.

"For (you may not know it, Mrs. Grierson, though it seems to me that everybody does get to know everything, especially at Richerden) my mother's money is all in her own hands; and I—we—are as poor as church mice."

Mrs. Grierson smiled. "Money is a good thing and a bad thing, but not half such an important thing as

some folks imagine. It need not hinder a man from going to see his own mother."

Roderick winced slightly. "Then you think my pride wrong."

"Not pride for her," with a tender glance at Silence. "But as for yourself—a man satisfied of his own real motives should be indifferent to any imputed ones. That is not his concern at all."

"You are right—I admit it. Still, as to my wife—"

But Silence flung herself, in one of her rare outbursts of emotion, on her knees beside her husband. "Go, I beseech you, go! She is alive—you can hear her speak—you can make her understand you love her. Oh, Roderick, you don't know what it is to call when there is none to answer—to weep when there is no one to comfort you. You cannot tell what it is to feel that one's mother is dead!"

He kissed and comforted her into calmness; but something struck and startled him, something which, under all her sweet cheerfulness, he had never found out before—that mystery of being "*acquainted* with grief." He himself had known vexation, annoyance, disappointment—but sorrow, heart-sorrow, he had never known. She had. Young as she was, he felt from that hour that in many things his wife was both older and wiser than he.

"I will do exactly as you wish," he said. "Mrs. Grierson, will you write to my mother, and say I shall be with her at the appointed hour? But remember—as, indeed, I shall tell her myself—that it is wholly and solely because my wife desires it."

So he went. When he came back, which was almost immediately, he sat down beside Silence, and kissed her without a word.

"Well, dear?"

"Well, my love, I have done as you wished, and—there is an end of it."

"What did she say?"

"We had neither of us any opportunity of saying anything. She had, or discovered she had, important business at Richerden, and left at eight this morning."

"Without any letter or message?"

"Without one single word. And now, my wife, that page is turned over. Let us close the book and begin again. Is it not best, Mrs. Grierson?"

The old lady hesitated. There were tears in her kindly eyes.

"It shall be best," said Roderick, firmly. "Come, my darling, let us thank our dear friend here for all her goodness to us. Let us pack up our boxes and return to Blackhall."

To Roderick, as perhaps to most men, anything decided was easier than a thing uncertain. He recovered his spirits sooner than Silence, who was greatly distressed, could at all have expected. Perhaps, like many of us, having resolved to do a painful thing, he was not sorry when fate stepped in to prevent his doing it. And he listened patiently to Mrs. Grierson's arguments against rashly judging what might have been pure accident or unavoidable necessity.

"We shall see," he said. "In the mean time, need we say any more? My wife and I have an equal dislike to talking it over. Let us all forget it, and spend a happy last day together."

It was happy, and the next day too. Mrs. Grierson, who while consenting to their departure had sorely regretted it, accompanied them part way on their journey, and made it as easy as she could. Her farewell words, too, were given with unmistakable, earnest affection. "Roderick, take care of your wife."

He did take care of her, with an instinct new, but strangely sweet. Most men have passion in them; many have a kindly good nature and a sort of ever-craving affectionateness which passes for love; but very few have that tenderness—that generous devotion of the strong to the weak, the helpful to the helpless,

which constitutes the highest manliness, and which is best described by the Scripture phrase, "I was as an husband unto them." Roderick had it.

Lovely as the day was—one of those rare late autumn days which in Scotland make earth look like paradise—and beautiful as was the scenery through which they passed, Silence was so tired with her journey that for the last few miles she lay with her head on Roderick's shoulder, scarcely speaking a word, and only rousing herself when she saw, glimmering like stars in the distance, the window lights of Blackhall.

"Ah!" she sighed, "that must be home."

"'East or west, hame is best,' 'Home is home, be it ever so homely,'" said Roderick, as he lifted her indoors, and set her in the large arm-chair by the blazing fire, seeing nothing, heeding nothing, except the little pale face which to him was so infinitely dear.

Not until tea was over, and her cheerful smile had fully returned, did he notice, among the small heap of papers lying waiting for him, the fatal well-known book-pocket—the MS. returned.

He tried to cover it over, and not let his wife see it, but her eye was too quick. Vain, too, was the innocent deception of his protest that he had "fully expected this," and "did not care."

"But I care," said Silence, mournfully. And then the poor young things sat down face to face with their bitter disappointment, and tried to bear it as well as they could.

The third "stony-hearted" publisher had taken a good deal of trouble over the rejected MS. He had had it read carefully, and enclosed the "reader's" opinion, a shrewd, kindly, and if severe, not unjust analysis of the whole; holding out a hope that after long years of patient study the author might succeed in finding a public, not for that, but for something else of a different sort.

"Very kind of him," said Roderick, passively; "and in the mean time we may starve."

"Not quite that, dear," said Silence, gently. "You know we have enough for ourselves if we live wholly to ourselves. Remember what Mrs. Grierson was saying the other day, that the greatest evil of poverty was because people will not spend their money upon their own family and its needs, but in making a show before the eyes of the world. Now, this might be necessary at Richerden, but here where we live so quietly——"

"Quietly—quietly! Blackhall will soon drive me mad with its quietness! To vegetate here upon a pound or two a week, so long as there was the remotest chance of working my way to something better! I can't do it; no man could."

"And no woman who really loved her husband would let him do it."

"Thank you, my darling. I thought you would say so. Even though you are a woman you can understand. You will not be a coward? You will buckle on my breastplate and let me plunge into the fight? Then, like our friend Macbeth—

'At least I'll die with harness on my back.'

She laughed—they both laughed. Ay, even through all their distress. There was in them that wonderful ever-renewed spring of hope which, in pure natures, is long before it runs dry.

"So that is settled. I will see Mr. Black to-morrow about the possibility of letting Blackhall, and then, if we can let it, we will go to London at once."

Silence made no reply. Her drooped face turned white—then scarlet—then white once more.

"Come, wise little woman, what is the matter with you? You have given your consent, now give your opinion. Where shall we go, and when?"

"I think, if you will let it be so, I should like us to stay quietly here until the spring."

"Why? What possible reason——"

Silence put both her arms round her husband's neck, and looked at him, right into his eyes, a strangely solemn, tender, absolutely speechless look.

Then—he knew.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE very day after their return to Blackhall, Roderick, with a cheerful countenance, put his luckless MS. on the topmost shelf of the old oaken press in the dining-room, where nobody could get at it by anything short of a most resolute will and a step-ladder.

"Lie there, my *magnum opus*! till I have gathered sufficient *opes* to publish you at my own expense, and distribute a copy each to all my friends, who then will have become so numerous that I shall clear off thereby at least the first edition. For the rest"—seeing, though his wife tried to smile, her eyes were brimming—"never mind, love, even if your husband was not born to be a writer—at any rate, a novel-writer—I may come out in another line, as a moral essayist, perhaps; or, who knows! having, they say, a little of my grandfather in me, I may drop, or rise, into a capital man of business after all."

"What do you mean!" she asked, timidly.

"Something of which I have been thinking all night, and am going to speak to Black about this morning," said Roderick, taking down his hat. "Never let grass grow under your feet when you have made up your

mind to a thing I may not have much 'mind'—according to our friends, the publishers—but I have got a will of my own; and I am determined to be a rich man yet. At least, rich enough to keep Blackhall from dropping into ruins. Not this century, please God, shall any enterprising author write an improving work on 'The Last of the Jardines.' ”

Gaily as he spoke, there was deep earnest beneath the jest—the earnestness of a man who has courage enough to take his fate into his own two hands, and, however heavily weighted, prepare to run the race of life without complaining. True, the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong—many a one, without fault of his own, flags, staggers, drops, and dies; still that man is not half a man who, with youth and health on his side, shrinks at the outset from either disappointed ambition, or fear of poverty, or any other of those nameless terrors which come with later life. Especially when he has not to fight single-handed, or for himself alone.

There is a creed abroad that a young man is better alone, free from all encumbrance of wife or children; but in the old times it was not so. Then children were esteemed “an heritage and gift that cometh from the Lord”—now, selfish luxury, worldliness, and the love of outward show, have brought our young men—ay, and some women too—to such a pass that they feel, nay, openly declare, every child born to them is a new enemy; and marriage, instead of being “honourable” to all, is a folly, a derision, or a dread.

Why is this? And is it the men's fault or the women's? Both, perhaps; yet, I think, chiefly the women's. Feeble, useless, half-educated; taught to believe that ignorance is amusing, and helplessness attractive; no wonder the other sex shrinks from taking upon itself, not a help, but a burden—charming enough before marriage—but after? The very man who at first exulted in his beautiful ornamental wife, his sweet,

humble Circassian slave, will, by-and-by, be the first to turn round and scorn her.

No man could ever scorn Silence Jardine. In spite of her sacred feebleness, she resumed at once the business of life—harder than anybody knows who has not tried the experiment of making sixpence do the work of a shilling. And she did it cheerfully, without any outward sign. Brain never idle; feet never still, or, if compelled to stillness, hands always busy at something or another; full of endless care and thought for others, most of all for Roderick, who never thought of himself or his own pleasure at all; even in her room, or on her sofa, Mrs. Jardine managed to be the very soul of the house, planning everything, arranging everything, and, it often seemed, doing everything.

It was a solitary life she led, for her husband took to going down to the mill every day, and all day long; it “amused” him, he said, and indeed he always came home looking so busy and cheerful that she was glad of the change for him. But it was a life of perfect peace. And then, it was full of day-dreams.

“Are you not dull sometimes?” said Roderick one day, when he came in a little earlier than usual, and found her sitting sewing by the fading October light, but with such a placid smile on her lips, such a silent bliss in her eyes.

“Dull? How could I be? I was only thinking.”

“I have been thinking too; only I would not tell you till I was quite sure of myself,” said he, as he sat down beside her. “Silence, I do really believe your husband is not such a goose as he seems. Black says so; and Black, though an oddity, is by no means a bad fellow.”

Silence smiled. She had oftentimes battled against her husband’s dislike to the honest man, whose roughness “rubbed him up the wrong way,” as he said, even worse than Mrs. Maclagan. Now under the rough rind he had discovered the pleasant kernel. Things had evidently righted themselves.

"He objected to me strongly at first because I was a gentleman, which was as great a delusion in its way as my setting him down a boor because he wore a rough coat, and had manners to match. Now we both understand one another better. I have been working with him at the mill for fourteen days, and what do you think is the result?"

He spoke with a buoyancy of tone and manner such as Silence had not seen in him for weeks.

"Something is going to happen—that is, if my wife does not object, which, being a very sensible woman, I don't think she will. I am actually going to earn my daily bread."

She turned round—her lips quivering.

"Now don't begin to cry about it, Mrs. Jardine, my dear; it isn't breaking stones upon the road, or anything very dreadful; and the bread I shall earn will not be too luxurious—only two pounds a week—one hundred pounds a year, which is my precise value just at present. Flattering!—but it is something. I am rather proud of my position as bread-winner—I that never earned a halfpenny in all my days."

He spoke a little fast, and with a flushed cheek. She put her hand upon his, and held it with a soft, firm hold.

"Tell me all."

"There is not very much to tell. You know how fond I always was of machinery—indeed, once I begged to be made an engineer, but my—they at home" (he never named his mother now) "thought the profession was not 'genteel' enough, and it is too late now, Black says. But he also says, as a mill-owner I might find my turn for mechanics extremely useful. I could watch, examine, perhaps, even invent; indeed, during these two weeks, I have made a suggestion or two which he is pleased to consider 'admirable.' 'Mr. Jardine,' he said to me this morning, 'if you were but a capitalist and could start a mill, or a working man

who required to earn your bread as overseer or foreman—you'd do.' And I startled him by telling him I was a working man, and I did require to earn my bread; and, if he thought I deserved foreman's wages, I would take them gratefully, and——Why, Silence, my darling! Not crying?"

But she was, though she dried her tears at once. "Oh, Roderick! and this is done for me!"

"For you and—it," he whispered, and then there was a long pause of speechless peace.

"I don't wish to make myself out a martyr, not the least in the world," said Roderick, at last. "I like my work—I like all work, indeed, but this especially. And Black is by no means a bad fellow to work with when you only know him. There is that great difference in our ages which prevents jarring—and then he has such a veneration for the family."

"Yes, that is it. But there, too, lies the difficulty. To be foreman at a cotton-mill! You, a gentleman and a Jardine! Have you considered?"

"It is because I am a gentleman and a Jardine that I do not need to consider," he answered, with that slight air of hauteur which, whether it was right or wrong, his wife loved, could not help loving, for it was a bit of himself. "No, dear; in my worst, that is, my idlest days, I never was so foolish as to think there was any disgrace in work, any dignity in idleness; and now, when I have to earn my bread in the sweat of my brow, like old Adam and all the rest, down to poor grandfather Paterson, I'll do it, and not be ashamed of it either."

"Nor I. Nothing that my husband did could make me ashamed of him, except his doing something wrong. But now——"

She stopped, her voice choking; and again, weak-minded little woman that she was, she cried—they both cried. Then they gathered up their courage for the new life which began the next Monday morning.

It might have been—possibly any person more worldly-wise than these two would have said decidedly it was—that this two pounds a week, so important to them, came out of the softest bit in old Black's heart, rather than his full and usually tightly-shut purse, seeing it would be some months before an ignorant "gentleman," however capable, could be equal in value to an experienced working man, even as foreman at a mill. But they did not know this, and without another word both cheerfully accepted the new life which was to begin the next Monday morning.

The hardest bit of it was the long hours—the separation from the dusk of the morning till after nightfall. Sometimes Roderick came in so tired that, instead of talking, he would just throw himself down—not on the sofa, that he always left for her, but on the rug at her feet—and fall asleep till bedtime; while she, anxious to use her busy fingers to the last available minutes, sewed silently, watching him the while. If he had seen that watch! Does a man ever thoroughly comprehend how a woman loves him?

But, the working-days done, there were the blessed Sundays: he never knew how blessed, he said, till he became "a working-man." Church over, his wife sent him to take a long stroll over the hills, while she gathered round her for an hour the little class of mill-girls, taught for so many years by Miss Jardine.

Roderick sometimes grumbled at this, but she said, gently,

"We each do our work. I think this is mine; let me do it!"

And by the time he came to tea it was done, and the jealous fellow had his wife to himself for the whole evening.

Those sweet Sunday evenings, when "the rain was on the roof"—for winter set in early that year—how comfortable they were! The two, shut in together, had to learn the great secret, and go through the

hardest test of married life—even such young married life as theirs—constant companionship. Not love, not passion, scarcely even affection—for all these can sometimes exist without it, at least for a long time—but simple companionship, that priceless friendship which is “love without his wings.”

“Suppose you had been a goose, Silence,” he said one day. “Suppose you had expected me to be always making love to you, instead of talking to you like a sensible woman: suppose you had not cared for the things I care for, but wanted something totally different—say dressing and dancing, and going out of evenings—what in the world would have become of me?”

She laughed merrily.

“And suppose you had been a man of the world, who liked good dinners and brilliant society, and was ashamed of his poor little wife because she was not clever——”

“Nonsense!”

“Not clever,” she repeated, with a sweet decision, “after the fashion that is called clever; nor beautiful, nor grand; had brought him no money and given him no position—I don’t speak often of this, but I know it all. Suppose, Roderick, you had been different from what you are; I wonder what would have become of me! No, no!” and her gaiety melted into an almost sad seriousness. “Whatever the future brings we have the present. Let us rejoice in it, and—let us thank God.”

In his old life Roderick had seldom thought of this. Now, when every night he saw his wife kneel down by her bedside, he had come instinctively to kneel beside her, “saying his prayers” as the children do; or rather, since with her always near him there seemed nothing left to pray for, just whispering in his heart “Thank God!” As he did now—ay, and many a time in the day, in the midst of his work, which was

not too pleasant sometimes. But it grew pleasant and easy when there flashed across him the vision of the sweet face at home—no longer the ideal mistress of his dreams, but the dear wife of his bosom, always at hand to lighten his burdens and divide his cares.

“Poor old Black!” he said one day—or rather night—when, after toiling, soaked through, up the steep brae, he sat down a few minutes after, dry and warm, by the bright fire, holding the little hands which had served him so lovingly. “Poor Black, whom I left in his large, handsome, empty house! I am quite sorry for all old bachelors.”

“Thank you, dear.”

“Though he told me once, in a confidential moment, that his life had been so hard he was often glad there had been no one to share it.”

“He was mistaken.”

“I think he was mistaken,” Roderick said, pressing his lips on the smooth brow and bright brave eyes that looked on life utterly without fear, so long as it was a life with love in it. “I cannot believe that any man is the weaker, but the stronger, for having a woman to help him. Only he must choose a woman who *can* help him—as I did.”

“You are very conceited,” she said, gaily, and then clung to him passionately. “Two together; I can bear anything if we are two together. But if you had left me to go through my life alone——” A kind of shiver passed through her. “Some have to bear it, and do: Cousin Silence did. And I would have borne it too—I told you so once. I would have lived a busy, useful life. I would not have died. But oh! the difference, the difference!

“And oh! the difference to me!” he said, as he clasped her to his heart, and felt the peace and strength she gave him. And then, coming back to common things, he added, “Poor old Black! he has been just a trifle ‘difficult’ of late; he is not the best temper in

the world, and he likes you so much, you perhaps might smooth him down. If I bring him home with me to-morrow, can you give us some supper, Mrs. Jardine?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL THE WORLD AND HIS WIFE.

IN the dusk of the next evening, the tall young fellow, handsome and strong, and the bent old figure with the brown wig and yellow gaiters, appeared at the front door, which the mistress always herself opened for her husband.

"I was going to introduce *the* visitor," said he, "for we never have any other: but look here! I feel like Robinson Crusoe when he saw the footmark on the shore. Wheels! horses' feet! Mrs. Jardine, you must have been entertaining a carriage and pair?"

"Two carriages and pairs! They have only just gone. And they were so very nice."

"The carriages?"

"No, the people. Such 'nice' people: is not that your English word—*gentil, agréable, charmant*?"

"She is going back to her French again—the renegade!"

"No, I am thoroughly Scotch now. Mr. Black knows it," said she, as with gentle, almost filial hands she took off the old man's plaid and bonnet, and set him in the arm-chair, he submitting with astonishing meekness; but all old people, just as all children, loved and submitted to Silence.

"How bright your eyes look! Did your visitors talk French with you, my darling?"

"A little, for they had been a great deal abroad. But they were so simple and kindly, not grand or over-dressed like"—she stopped.

"Like other friends of ours, whom, being friends, we will not criticize," said Roderick, with a kind of sad dignity. It had been a sore vexation to him that, except the Griersons, nearly all the Scotch-women his wife had met were of the class of Mrs. MacLagan, that exaggeration of national qualities which people of one country constantly make the type of another. "But, my dear, who are your visitors? Mr. Black will be sure to know them."

"Ou, ay; but they would never condescend to know me," said the old man, fingering, with a half-comical awe, the cards on the table. "Sir John and Lady Symington, of Symington; Mr. and Mrs. MacAlister, of Castle Torre. I told you, sir,"—he always addressed Roderick out of business hours as "sir," and Silence as "madam"—"the gentry of the neighbourhood would soon be finding out that there were again Jardines at Blackhall. Besides, Sir John and your father were lads thegither, and MacAlister, of Torre—he was a bit bairn then."

"Yes," said Silence, after a puzzled pause at the Scotch words, which, when he forgot himself, the old man continually brought in. "Yes, they told me so. They spoke of *him*—Roderick, you would have liked to hear how they spoke of your father. And they said they hoped we should be good neighbours, and meet very often."

Roderick looked pleased—it is but human nature to enjoy being "respeckit like the lave"—but suddenly he clouded over. "Don't let us talk of this; it is impossible."

Silence was so astonished at the tone as well as the words that the natural, innocent "Why?" died on her lips. She turned away, and began talking to Mr. Black of something else, asking no more questions,

nor referring again to the visitors, who, Roderick saw with pain, had evidently charmed her, and been a little brightness in the long, empty day.

He told her so when the old man departed, after a rather dull two hours ; for the master of the house was very silent, and when he did speak there was once or twice the faintest shade of discontent in his tone, a sort of half-apology for their simple *ménage* and frugal fare, of which Silence took no outward notice. She had given her guest the best she had—given it with a warm heart too, and a grateful—for Mr. Black had been very kind, and many a brace of grouse and bunch of grapes had found their way from the Mill-house to Blackhall.

“And I think he knows our ways, and does not expect us to requite him with turtle and venison,” said the young hostess.

“Perhaps not ; he knows the barrenness of the land,” answered Roderick, sharply—very sharply for him. “But other folks do not know, and need not. Your magnificent visitors, for instance. I hope you did not let them penetrate beyond the drawing-room, or invite them to stay to tea, lest they might quote the famous lines—

‘Love in a hut with water and a crust,
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust.’”

“I think you may well ask Love to forgive you, dear,” Silence answered, not echoing the laugh, which was scarcely a merry laugh. “Yes, I offered them tea, for I liked them, and I wanted them to stay till you came home, thinking you would like them too. They did stay, as long as they possibly could, and we had a pleasant talk, and Janet was baking, so I gave them some hot scones, and——”

“What charming hospitality ! It must have reminded them of Caleb Balderstone’s. Why, my dear wife, we shall soon have to set up a Caleb Balderstone,

since Blackhall has grown into a sort of Wolf's Hope. Silence, my darling"—taking her face between his hands, and trying hard to curb his excessive irritation—"you are the sweetest and simplest of women; but—you must not invite people here again. Not people such as these. They would only go home and laugh at us. I don't care for myself: I can dine off porridge and salt—it would not harm me—but I cannot bear the world to know it. We must put the best on the outside."

She looked up, more than surprised—startled. Evidently there was something in the woman's nature—larger or smaller, who shall decide?—which could not understand the man's at all.

"Never mind, however, for this once. We'll hire a fly—a carriage and pair, perhaps, in noble emulation—return these visits, and any others with which the 'gentry of the neighbourhood,' as old Black called them, may condescend to honour us—and so end it all. To keep up acquaintance with them is, as I said, simply impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Can you not see? Birds of a feather *must* flock together—it is natural law. These people are the 'magnates of the county,' and we the impoverished Jardines of Blackhall. Besides, did you tell them—it was just like you, my innocent one, to do it—that I am also foreman of the cotton-mill?"

Again she looked at him, in quiet surprise. He seemed so very unlike himself.

"If I had told them, would it have mattered very much?"

"Certainly not—to me. But I think it would to them. Dear, a man is always despised for being poor; and—I will not be despised. I can live upon bread and water, dress in fustian—or rags if necessary: but my wife will prevent that," added he, tenderly. "Only our poverty must not betray itself. If we appear in

the world at all, it must be as Mr. and Mrs. Jardine of Blackhall. Whatever we suffer, let us 'die and make no sign.' Or, even to go a little further, let us imitate that very reserved gentleman of whom his valet said, 'Master's dead, sir—but he doesn't wish it to be generally known.' ”

Silence did not laugh at the stale joke, which indicated a long under-current of bitter thought, now welling up to the surface: but she attempted no remonstrance.

“My friend”—the old tender “*mon ami*”—“do not be angry with me. I liked these people because I thought you would like them too, and that a little society would be good for you; but since it cannot be——”

“Since it cannot be,” he repeated, decisively, “we will not trouble ourselves about it, or them. Doubtless our neighbours will trouble themselves very little about us—at least, as soon as they know all facts concerning us, which, of course, they very soon will. Never mind, my wife. Kiss me, and be happy! We are happy, are we not? Let the world go its way—who cares?”

But it was evident he did care; and when, after a week or two, he found he had been mistaken, and people did “trouble themselves” about the young Jardines, inasmuch that, by-and-by, “everybody,” either from friendliness, respect, or curiosity, had called at Blackhall—whether pleased or vexed, Rod-erick was certainly interested.

“Well, and who has been here to-day?” was always his first question on coming up from the mill; sometimes adding, with a bitter earnest underlying the jest, that he hoped she had told all her grand neighbours that her husband was “out at work,”—his daily work as foreman of the mill.

“Yes. I thought you wished everybody to know? It could not matter, you being a gentleman and a Jardine. You once said so.”

"And I say so still, in my best moments; but in my worst—— Well, I suppose, we men are great cowards—moral cowards. No matter, I am glad the murder's out. You did it for the best, my wife: and it is the best, for they will never come again, depend upon it."

But, strange to say, they did; and at last it became absolutely necessary to return these friendly visits.

"I will beg a holiday from my master"—poor Roderick! he sometimes took a savage pleasure in the word. "We will hire the village fly, and go in state: appearing for once as respectable people—Mr. and Mrs. Jardine of Blackhall."

"I think we are respectable people," the wife answered; she had learned not to be hurt at these accidental bitternesses. "We are well-born, well-bred; we live in our pretty house; we pay our debts; and we stint nobody—except ourselves, perhaps."

Herself, she might have said, for her husband, simple as he was in all his ways, wonderfully so, considering his up-bringing, never suspected how many domestic and personal sacrifices were necessary, that she might in a sense, though not the sense he had meant it, really "put the best on the outside for him when he came home.

He was at home so little now that the whole day's holiday—they two together—was quite a treat to look forward to. But when, instead of the village fly, which Mr. Black had offered to order for them, there came up his own well-appointed but rarely used carriage, with his compliments, and the horses had not been out for a week, would Mrs. Jardine oblige him by using them?—then Roderick's pride rose up at once.

"Make Mrs. Jardine's compliments to Mr. Black, and she regrets extremely that——"

A hand laid on his arm—a whisper which always

fell on his jarring nerves like a soft finger-touch on a quivering harp-string.

"Dear, yesterday, when I was thanking Mr. Black for all his kindness, he said—you know his quick, husky way of speaking—'Madam, you may have a hard life—I rather think you will—but I hope you will never know one hardship—to find yourself in your old age without one single human being whom you have a right to be kind to.'"

"Poor old fellow!" said Roderick, much moved. "My little Conscience! you are right. John, tell your master he is exceedingly kind, as he always is; and Mrs. Jardine will enjoy her drive extremely."

So she did—to an almost pathetic degree—for it was weeks since she had been outside the garden gate. And the whole world was so lovely that still November day—November, but bright as June—it often is so in Scotland—all the fading landscape looking as beautiful as an old face sometimes looks to eyes that loved it when it was young.

These two sitting side by side and hand-in-hand, though they hid the latter fact under a kindly plaid from John the coachman—were young still; to them the dying year brought only a charming sadness. They were very happy, and all the happier, Roderick declared, because in their circuit of nearly twenty miles, owing to the rarely fine day, they found everybody "out" except one family—the Symingtons.

Sir John—a "fine old Scottish gentleman" of the last generation—with his old wife beside him, still keeping the remains of that delicate English beauty which had captured him fifty years ago, was, even Roderick owned, quite a picture. And they remembered his father; and they had known Cousin Silence. Their greeting was more than courteous—friendly; and their house, upon which, being childless, they had expended all they had to spend, was full of art-treasures

collected abroad, each with a history and an interest. The old couple seemed still to have the utmost enjoyment in life, and to have the faculty of making others enjoy life too.

"I knew you would like them," said Silence, when, having sent the carriage away, they walked home through the wood-path, which, Sir John carefully pointed out to them, made Symington only a quarter of an hour's distance from Blackhall.

"Yes, I like them. That is just the sort of house I should care to go to, if I could go. Lucky folk these Symingtons. They seem to have had everything heart can desire."

"Not quite. Did you see a miniature over Lady Symington's arm-chair? She saw me looking at it, and said—you should have heard the tone, quiet as she is—'That was our only son—my one child! He died at seven years old.' I think," Silence continued, softly, "if you do not mind, I should like now and then to go and see Lady Symington."

Her husband pressed her arm, and then said, suddenly,

"My innocent wife, what a happy way you have of taking everything!"

"It is because I am so happy."

"And I—yes, I ought to be happy too, God knows! But——"

She put her hand upon his lips.

"God *does* know. And I know too. Many things are very hard for you to bear—much harder for you than for me. We will not speak of them, we will just bear them. We can bear them, I think, together."

"Yes, my darling!"

And after that he made no more "misanthropic" speeches for the whole evening.

CHAPTER XXV.

TELLING THE TRUTH.

A WEEK afterwards, coming back from meeting the postman, which he always did, though few letters ever came, and never those which, his wife could see, he missed and looked for still, Roderick threw down before her a heap of notes.

"Look here, dear. Evidently, as old Black says, the 'hale countrie' has fallen in love with young Mrs. Jardine. Four invitations to dinner and one to a dance—extending over three weeks and an area of fifteen square miles. To accept them would take half our quarterly income, in carriage-hire, &c.; and to return them, why, six Caleb Balderstones could scarcely accomplish that feat."

She read, and laid the notes aside, with a rather sad face.

"You would like to go? Well, then, my darling, shall we don our purple and fine linen—we have a few rags of splendour left—and fare sumptuously at our neighbours' expense—for four days? We can starve afterwards for fourteen: I'm willing, if you are."

"Roderick!"

"Else—we must get up some excuse—you must have a cough, and be unable to go out of evenings."

"But I am able—they may see me at church every Sunday."

"Most literal of women! Of course it is a 'big lee'—as Black would call it. But any lie will do; the bigger the better, since we cannot possibly tell the truth."

"Why not?"

The question was so direct and simple, yet so per-

fectly natural, that it staggered him. He laughed, though not very mirthfully, and made no reply.

"Why not tell the truth?" Silence repeated. "It would be much the easiest way. Why not say to everybody, what everybody must know, or will soon, that we are not rich enough to keep a carriage or give entertainments, but that we appreciate our neighbours' kindness, and will be glad to meet them whenever chance allows. Shall I write and say this? Nobody could be offended, for it is just the simple truth. And surely the truth is better than even the whitest of lies."

He had lived beside her and with her for a whole year now—this woman, so different from all other women he had ever known; and yet he seemed always to be finding out something new in her—some divine simplicity which made all his worldly wisdom useless; some innocent courage which put even his manliness to shame. But he was too truly manly not to own this.

"My darling," he said, not laughing now, "I did not propose to tell a lie—not seriously. But the truth must be hid sometimes, when it is an unpleasant and humiliating truth. Come, then, shall we make a great effort, and appear at all these fine houses *en grande tenue*, and in a carriage and pair (Black's, perhaps, borrowed for the occasion), and 'make believe,' as the children say, that we are rich people?"

"Would not that be acting a lie, which comes to the same thing as telling it? Did not your father once say so? And you once told me that if"—she paused a moment—"if you had boys you would teach them exactly as your father taught you, that either to tell or act a lie was absolutely impossible to a gentleman and a Jardine!"

"You little Jesuit!"

"Don't call me that!" and her eyes filled with the quick tears, which, however, she rarely allowed to fall—she was not a "crying" woman. "I cannot argue, I can only feel: and think. Dearest, I sit and think

a great deal—more than in all my life before. I ought, you know——”

Her head dropped, and a sudden flush came over the sweet young face, firm through all its sweetness, much firmer than even a little while ago. Her brief eight months of married life had made a woman of her. And there were the long lonely hours—alone, yet not alone—when a wife, ever so young, cannot choose but sit thinking of what God is going to give her; of the mingled joy and fear, and solemn responsibility, stretching out into far generations. Well indeed may she say, even as the holy woman of whom it is recorded, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word.”

Something of this—expressing what she never said—was written in Silence’s face. Her husband could not quite understand it—no man could; but he saw the soft, tired look—tired, but not weak—there was nothing weak about her; and he put his arm round her very tenderly.

“My darling, speak; you know I will always listen to you, even though I may differ from you. No two people can always think alike. But I wanted a wife, a counsellor; I did not want a Circassian slave.”

She laughed; still she paused a little before answering. It was hard to go against him—hard to put into plain, ugly words the fact that she, a wife, dared to think her husband wrong. Dear as he was to her—this passionately loved Roderick—there was something in the other love, dimly dawning, growing daily into a mysterious yet most absolute reality, which made her at once clear-sighted and brave, with the courage that all women ought to have when they think of themselves, not as themselves, but as the mothers of the men that are to be.

“Roderick”—he was startled by the sweet solemnity of her tone—“this seems a smaller thing than it is. Whether we accept these invitations or not, matters

little; but it does matter a great deal whether we begin our married life with truth or untruth; whether we meet the world with an utterly false face, or else a sullen face, rejecting all its kindnesses, instead of, with a perfectly honest face, saying openly, 'We are poor, we know, and it is not pleasant; but it is no disgrace. We are neither afraid nor ashamed.'"

"That might be very well in Utopia; but here? Did you ever know anybody who did it?"

"Yes; my father and mother did it. Yours——"

Roderick hesitated. "Perhaps my father might, only——"

They were both silent.

"Think, dearest," she continued; "it is a question not merely for to-day or to-morrow, but of all our lives. We may be poor all our lives."

"God forbid!"

The hasty mutter, the gloomy look; they went to his wife's heart, and he could see they did; but still she never shrank.

"I, too, say 'God forbid,' for I know, even better than you do, how hard poverty is. Oh, my Roderick! when I think of what I have cost you"—her voice faltered—"of all you have lost through me!"

"Lost—and gained."

"Yes, I will not lightly myself, nor underrate the woman you chose, who you thought would make you happy. And I *will* make you happy, even if we are not rich."

"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her," said he, fondly. "But come, this is great nonsense, and quite beside the question. What is the question, by-the-by? for I am getting rather confused, and"—looking at his watch, "I must be off to my work. Oh, what a comfort work is! Don't you perceive that I have been twice as happy, and, therefore, twice as good, since I was a working man?"

She saw through the little loving ruse to save her

pain ; it made her feel doubly the pain she was giving—was obliged to give.

“ You are always good ”—taking his hand, and kissing it—“ and inexpressibly good to me, no matter how great a burden I am.”

“ The heaviest burden I ever had to carry, and the sweetest. But that is neither here nor there ”—with a sudden change to seriousness, the serious, almost sad, look that sometimes came over him, showing how the youth had changed into a man, the man into a husband—truly a husband—*house-band*, the stay and support of the house. “ Dear, we have chosen our lot ; we cannot alter it ; we would not if we could. It is not all bright ; I know that ; but we must not make it darker than it is. We must not look back.”

“ No.”

“ And for the future——”

Then her strength seemed to come into her—strength born of a “ farther-looking hope ” than even he could take in.

“ It is of that future I think,” she said. “ We may be poor, as I said, all our lives. I hope not ; but we may. Are we, and more than we, to make life one long struggle and deceit, by ‘ keeping up appearances,’ or are we to face the worst, to appear exactly what we are, and trust the world to accept it as such ? I believe it would—at least, the good half of it. For the others, why need we care ? ”

Gently as she spoke, it was with a certain resoluteness, and the hand which clasped her husband’s felt firm as steel.

“ For me,” she went on, laying her hand on his shoulder and creeping close to him, “ I am so proud, both for myself and you, that, when these people invite me, I believe they really want me—me myself, and not my clothes or my carriage. And when they come to see me, I flatter myself it is really to visit *me*. And if I liked them, and felt them truly my friends, I

would go and see them, and wish my husband to do the same, whether they were poor professeurs—like ours at Neuchâtel—or your English dukes and duchesses.”

“Even if they said to us, as I have seen condescendingly affixed to church doors, ‘Come in your working clothes;’ for I am not even a professor; I am a working man.”

“Certainly; but something else as well. Look in the glass; you don’t do it too often! Could anybody mistake you for anything but a gentleman?”

Roderick laughed, colouring a little.

“My dove, you are growing a veritable serpent. Mistress Eve, you tempt your Adam on man’s weakest point—vanity.”

“No, you are proud, not vain. Do not be afraid; I see all your faults clear as light.”

“Thank you.”

“As you mine, I hope; because then we can try to cure both. Dear, we are like two little children sent to school together. We may have many a hard lesson to learn; but we *will* learn them; together.”

He was silent. As she had said, things were harder for him than for her. She recognized this fully. You could have seen by her face that her heart bled for him, as people call it—that cruel “bleeding inside” which natures like hers so well understand; but she did not compromise or yield one inch even to him, and he knew her well enough by this time to be quite certain she never would.

A weak man might have resented this, have taken refuge in that foolish “I have said it, and I’ll stick to it,” or kept up that obstinate assertion of masterdom which usually springs from an inward terror of slavery; but Roderick was prone to neither of these absurdities. He had that truest strength which never fears to yield, if there be a rational need for yielding.

“My wife,” he said at last, taking her hand and

looking up with some gravity, but not a shadow of anger, "what do you wish me to do?"

"Do richt and fear nocht,' as your motto—our motto—says. That is all."

"What is the right?"

"The simple truth. Say it, and act it."

"How?"

"Let us tell our neighbours that we are not rich enough for what is called 'society,' but that we feel their kindness, and will accept it, whenever we can. Occasionally we will go and visit them—Symington, for instance, is quite within a walk; and when they visit us"—she smiled—"I hope I shall be able to give them a little hospitality, without need of a Caleb Balderstone."

"My darling!"

"Do not be afraid of me"—she kissed him with a slightly quivering lip. "I may be young and foolish, but I know how to keep up my husband's dignity, and my own. Now, shall I write the notes, or you?"

"You," he said, and, plunging into a favourite book, referred to the matter no more.

At supper-time she laid before him silently a little bundle of letters, which he read, and then looked up with the brightest smile.

"What a comfort is a wife who can get one out of a difficulty! You have the prettiest way of putting things—French grace added to Scotch honesty. How do you manage it?"

"I don't know. I just say what I feel; but I try to say it as pleasantly as I can. Why not?"

"Why not indeed! Only so few do it." He looked at her, sitting at the head of his table—young, indeed, but with a sweet matronly dignity added to her wonderful crystalline simplicity—looked at her with all his heart in his eyes. "People say that, though a man's business success rests with himself, his social status

depends upon his wife. I think, whether rich or poor, I may be quite sure of mine."

A glad light was in her eyes, but she made no answer, except just asking if the letters would do.

"Yes. But, little law-giver, I see you have accepted one invitation—the Symingtons?"

"You do not object? You liked them? And they will have a house full of pleasant people for Christmas—Lady Symington told me so. It is not good for man to be alone—not even with his own wife, who is half himself, and therefore no variety. Besides, I want you to see and be seen. I cannot bear you to hide your light under a bushel."

"Always me—nothing but me."

"It is always you—it ought to be," she cried, with that rare passion less expressed than betrayed. "You think so little of yourself that it is right some one should think of you. Everybody will by-and-by."

"We shall see. Once I had ambitions for myself."

"And now I have ambitions for you. They can wait. We are young. We bide our time. Only we'll leave nothing undone. We'll watch the turn of the tide."

"And meanwhile we'll go to the Symingtons," said he, with a smile. "You see, I let you have your own way."

"So you ought, if you think it is a right way. And I may send off these notes? You agree?"

"Yes. But," half jesting, half earnest, "suppose I had not agreed, what then? There is a little word in our English marriage service—it was not in the Swiss one, I think—'love, honour, and *obey*.'"

"The two former imply the latter; but, if an English wife does not love or honour, must she obey?"

"Would you obey?"

Silence paused a moment, and then answered softly, but very distinctly,

"No. Neither God nor man could require it of me. One *must* both honour and love the man that one obeys, or obedience is impossible. If a wife sees her husband

doing wrong she should try to prevent him ; if he tells her to do wrong she should refuse, for God is higher than man, even be it one's own husband. Roderick, you might ' cut me up in little pieces,' as the children say, but not even you could make me do what I felt I ought not to do, or hinder me in doing what I thought was right."

" My little rebel ! No," snatching her to his bosom, " my little Conscience—the best conscience a man can have—a wife who is afraid of nothing and nobody ; not even of himself."

" And you are not angry with me ? "

" Angry ?—because you spoke your mind ; even though I thought one thing and you another ?—as may happen many and many time. My dearest, did I not tell you once I wanted a wife, not a Circassian slave ? Time enough for you to turn slave when I turn tyrant. I may like to rule—most men do ; and it is fair they should, if they rule wisely, but I should despise myself if I attempted to tyrannize. Now kiss me ! Our discussion is over ; our first quarrel ended."

" Not a quarrel—only a difference of opinion."

" In which each holds his own till satisfactorily convinced of the contrary."

" Or till both see that there may be a wisdom beyond both theirs, which is perhaps the best lesson one learns in marriage. Except one ! "

And for the second time she took and kissed his hand, not in humiliation or repentance—what had she to repent of ?—but in that tender reverence, that entire trust, without which obedience is a fiction and love an impossibility. Then, ceasing to talk, he put her on the sofa, with her work-table beside her, and threw himself on the hearthrug at her feet, to " improve his mind," he said, and hers—by reading aloud. But, as often happened now, he was so tired that all these laudable intentions failed. He laid his head against his wife's lap and fell fast asleep with the book in his hand.

CHAPTER XXVI.

COALS OF FIRE.

"WHAT sort of people were we to meet to-night? Pleasant people, you said."

"And clever people, from Edinburgh and London, visitors in the house. Lady Symington brought one or two of them to call here to-day. I liked them."

"And I am sure they liked you, my darling," said Roderick, with a tender pride. "Well, it will be rather nice to go back for an hour or two to the old life; and rest one's ears from the endless buzz of machinery. Though I am fond of machinery," added he, hastily and cheerily. "It is like presiding as a temporary providence over a cosmogony of one's own making, taking care that all the wheels are kept going; doing one's utmost, and waiting calmly the final result, as one must in all things. Yes, I enjoy my work, and I mean to enjoy my play, if I am not too tired."

He had come in very tired—he often did; but, refreshed with tea and tender words, had now begun dressing for the Symington dinner, putting on his diamond studs, brushing out his curly hair; and his wife could see he rather liked the proceeding. He was a young man still.

She was young too—not at all above the pleasure "of making herself pretty," as he told her she looked, in her white wedding-dress; with her wedding veil transmuted into a shawl. He admired her—they mutually admired one another—and took a childish pleasure in the same.

"I wish I could give you a carriage!" sighed Roderick, as he muffled her in hood and plaid, for the ten minutes' walk under the fir-woods, through the clear, frosty December night.

"I am content with my own two feet, dear. Lady Symington offered the carriage, but I declined."

"Quite right. The poorer we are the more independent we will be. Always stick to the principle, 'Owe no man anything.'"

"Except 'to love one another,'" Silence added, gently. "I can't help loving her—that sweet old lady—however rich she is. And she is so cheerful, too. How she laughed at my thick boots, and showed them to the two young ladies she had with her—most gentlemanly young ladies, who dress almost like men, and pity themselves for being only women. Now it may be very conceited of me, dear, but I never wished to be a man in all my life!"

"Thank heaven for that!" said Roderick, with such energy that they both burst out laughing, and so started merrily, lantern in hand, through the solemn fir-wood, and across the open, breezy, star-lit moor.

Silence clung to her husband's arm. "This feels like the old days—the days when you used to walk home with us at night." She paused, and then continued in the low smothered tone which he had learned to understand now. "Did you ever think then that I loved you—that it was heaven to me just to walk beside you for a quarter of an hour? and now we walk together always—through life—into eternity. No—I shall not lose you even there."

He pressed her little hand nearer his heart, but said nothing. They walked on, watching the round, red moon, which was creeping up slowly through a cleft in the hills. Neither said "How beautiful!" just as neither said "I am happy," but they knew it without speaking.

So they reached, two humble pedestrians, the Symington hall-door.

"Are you afraid!" asked Roderick, as they paused to let a carriage pass them—the Castle Torre carriage, full of very resplendent MacAlisters.

“Not afraid of my host and hostess, but very much afraid of the butler, the footman, and the groom of the chambers.”

“Nevertheless, let us face even them,” said Roderrick, gaily, “for I am determined to have a pleasant evening.”

It felt like it when, having passed bravely through the ordeal of the entrance-hall, they found themselves in the fine old drawing-room, rich with the relics of a dozen generations of Symingtons, where Sir John and his wife received their guests.

There was once a popular song, “If I had a thousand a year,” wherein the singer described what he would do with that noble income—counted but a small one now-a-days. But ten thousand a year—what could one do with that? I think precisely what Sir John Symington did. A rich man, of cultivated tastes, with every right to gratify them, knowing enough of sorrow to humble his heart towards God and soften it towards his neighbour; gifted with not only the power but the will to do good, and having lived long enough to reap the fruits of an honourable youth in a calm old age—such a man is, spite of his riches, not unlikely to enter the kingdom of heaven. Ay, even in this world, as you could see by his contented look and quiet, stately bearing. They were indeed quite a picture, this old couple; he tall and thin, she round and rosy, with a cheek like a girl, and a smile like a child, as they came forward to meet the young couple, to whom life was only at its beginning.

“‘Thine own friend and thy father’s friend forsake thou not.’ Mr. Jardine, it is kind of you to come here to-day. I hope it will be not the last time by many that Blackhall honours Symington by entering its doors.”

These words, spoken with antique formality, and in a rather loud tone—Sir John was slightly deaf—were heard by everybody. Everybody saw, too, how Lady

Symington kissed Mrs. Jardine on both cheeks, foreign fashion, in cordial welcome. This might have been chance, or wise and kindly intention, but it had its effect. The MacAlisters, and all the other neighbours, came forward at once, ignoring both the poverty and the mill-work, and added their greetings. These "old families," as well as the clever English guests, were much simpler, Silence found, both in manners and toilettes, than the Richerden people. Very soon they made her feel thoroughly "at home." The more so as she saw her husband was "at home" likewise. There is in some houses an unconscious atmosphere of domestic and social ozone, which brightens everybody. Wealth cannot give it, nor poverty take it away. As they went in to dinner, Mrs. Jardine leaning on Sir John's arm as the stranger and the bride, she and Roderick smiled at one another, satisfied.

It was a *recherché* rather than a sumptuous meal, not one of those where the guests are evidently far less important than the food. And it was short, too—an hour and half being, the host said, quite enough to spend over eating and drinking. Also, not long after the ladies retired, the gentlemen followed them.

"You see, having been much abroad, we have adopted the best of foreign customs," said Lady Symington, smiling to see Mrs. Jardine's smile at the unexpected apparition of her husband behind her chair. "Sir John likes a pleasant evening, good talk and good music, quite as well as a good dinner; and I like it much better. Indeed, I am afraid I am very fond of society."

"So are we," said Roderick, looking down on his wife's happy face. And just as his host called him to join a group of men, every one of whom was "somebody," or had done "something," he found time to whisper, "You were quite right, Silence; I am glad we came."

After that she watched him, talking, listening, and

being listened to, holding his own always with his habitual courtesy, but, nevertheless, with the firmness and self-respect of a man who has cast his lot in life, whose fate is fixed, and heart at rest, so that he is now ready for the work of the world. He stood a good way from her, scarcely looking towards her—what need? This mingling with others made both feel only the more keenly and securely the sweet inward tie—“my own, my very own!”

As she sat in her quiet corner, that passionate ambition, not for self, but a dearer self, which in some women’s hearts is as strong even as love, woke up—no, it had already awakened—but it seemed to make itself felt to the very depths of her soul, until there came, added to it, another feeling, roused by a few chance words she overheard.

“Yes, a fine fellow, a very fine fellow, indeed. What a pity he is married!”

“Do you think so?”

“Just swamped; every man is, unless he can get that *rara avis*, a wife who is a help, and not a hindrance, not only at home, but in society.”

“Hush, there she is, that quiet little thing in the corner.”

“Eh?”

Silence had sharp ears; at least, she seemed to hear by instinct every word that was said about her husband. As the two gentlemen passed her they saw only the composed face, the quietly folded hands, but—she had heard.

Half an hour afterwards, Roderick, a little surprised, but glad, saw her the centre of a circle, talking to all who talked to her, not only in her pretty precise English, but in French and German—there were several foreigners in this cosmopolite house. Also, when requested by Lady Symington, she went at once to the piano and sang.

It was a very simple song; their favourite, “O

Nannie, wilt thou gang wi' me?" but after it came a hush, and then a burst of involuntary delight.

"Yes, that is my wife," Silence heard her husband answer to some one, very briefly, but she caught both the look and the tone. She went back to her seat, all her nervousness gone. She could face the world now. He was not ashamed of her.

Human nature is human nature after all. Many a good man loves with patient tenderness a wife very inferior to himself; many a woman upholds faithfully before the world the man she has married, who, all the world sees, and wonders sometimes if she sees, is altogether unworthy of her. This is right, noble; but it is also a little sad. The perfect bond, the true marriage, must always be between those who not only loved but are proud of one another—as were these.

The evening slipped by fast, so fast that the guests were already leaving; but Lady Symington begged the Jardines to stay a few minutes more.

"Well, the moon is full, and our horses will not catch cold by standing," said Roderick gaily to his wife. He was so thoroughly enjoying himself that, for the first time, he did not notice the little tired face. But Lady Symington did, and put Silence in her own arm-chair, secured round by curtains, above which hung the sweet picture of the long-dead boy. Upon it the eyes of both women, the young and the old, met tenderly.

"He must have been so pretty," Silence said.

"Yes. Almost like an angel, or it seems so now. He was a Christmas child. This Christmas he would have been thirty-nine, no, forty years old. How strange!"

The old lady spoke calmly, as old people learn to do. And then, like one habituated to repress herself, and think of others only, she added,

"Your husband is not near forty yet; he could not be, for Henry Jardine married late in life. Sir John lost

sight of him after that, but he was always very fond of him. We thought him so clever, so sure to make a name for himself one day. Perhaps his son will."

"I hope he will; yes, he shall."

The words were brief, but there was a sudden flash in the eye, indicating the faith which creates the hope, and the will which brings about both. And then, startled at herself, Silence shrank back behind the curtains of her pleasant nook, glad to hide for a few quiet minutes after the efforts even of their happy evening.

She strained her ears to catch her husband's voice, but instead she only heard the idle buzz of conversation behind her, little heeded, until her own name struck her ear.

"Jardine? surely I met a Mrs. Jardine at Richerden last week. Could she be a relation, mother or aunt, to that young fellow? Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"Oh, Mrs. MacAlister" (the speaker was one of the Symington guests), "if you had seen her! Astonishing in accent, and still more astonishing in dress; clannish, as I suppose you Scotch would call her—always talking of her 'family,' and evidently considering it the most important family in all Scotland. She had three daughters—one married to a man, Thomson—ugh! a nice son-in-law to have! You should have seen him in the drawing-room after dinner. But she never spoke of any son."

"Still I believe this is her son."

"You don't say so! That coarse, ignorant, vulgar woman?"

At this talk—heard quicker than it takes to write, and impossible not to hear, for the speakers were behind the curtain—Silence looked at her companion, whose eyes were cast down on the carpet. Making some remark quite foreign to the subject, Lady Sym-

ington rose; then, seeing the poor little scarlet face, she let all polite pretences drop.

"My dear, 'les absents ont toujours tort.' Let it pass—we will move away."

How can I let it pass? It is not true. And she is his mother. It cannot be true."

"If it were," said the old lady, quietly, "it could not affect any right-minded people. Your husband is, what he is, a Jardine of Blackhall, and the very image of his father."

"Still a mother is a mother always. I had one once."

In another moment, putting aside Lady Symington's detaining hand, she stood before the two ladies.

"I beg your pardon, but I overheard you. I could not help overhearing. You mistake. Mrs. Jardine, my mother-in-law, is a very good woman. Her children love her much. Uneducated she may be—her father was a working man—but 'coarse,' 'vulgar'—it is impossible."

"Whether or not," said the young London lady, equally touched and surprised, "I am sorry I said it. It is a certificate of merit to any woman that her son's wife should be so fond of her."

The poor little face, pale with pain, flushed visibly. "It is not that—it is because of the injustice. One should never let an injustice pass if one can help it."

The eager voice, pathetic even in its indignant pride, the manner so simple and straightforward—Mrs. MacAlister said next day that young Mrs. Jardine was the oddest and most "unconventional" young lady she ever knew; but there was no mistaking her meaning. Both ladies felt themselves, as the younger expressed it, "quite shut up," and made no end of incoherent apologies.

Silence accepted them, smiling. "It does not matter, since only I heard you—not my husband."

Just then, turning round, she saw Roderick standing

beside Lady Symington, and was quite certain, by the expression of his face, that he had heard, or guessed, everything that had passed.

He said nothing—what was there to say?—only came forward, bowing with almost more than his usual rather stately courtesy to the two ladies, drew his wife's arm in his, and, making their adieux to their hostess, took her away immediately.

Not until they had got out into the dark—the quiet, soothing, solitary night—did he break out in a passion of anger and grief.

“Coarse! vulgar! how dared they say it? Ignorant she may be. How could she be otherwise with her up-bringing? But she is, as you said, a thoroughly good woman. Thank you for saying it; thank you, my darling, for being so generous to my poor mother.”

“Not generous, only just,” whispered the soothing voice. “I could not be unjust to any mother, least of all to yours. They did not know her, those people, and they were sorry. You heard them say so.”

“I heard all; I was close by; but how could I speak? Coward that I was! It was you who were brave. Again, thank you, my darling.”

They walked on awhile in total silence, then Roderick burst out again.

“Yes; she is my mother. No unkindness can alter that. And she has done nothing really wrong—nothing that can make me cease to respect her. Her weaknesses—I know them, every one. It is nonsense to say children should not see their parents' faults; they must, and do. But then there is the love that covers all. She loved me, too, once. If I saw her this minute, I believe I should forget everything, except that she was my mother—my dear old mother.”

And a great sudden sob, like a boy's, betrayed what his wife had long guessed, the pent-up grief which even she could not wholly heal.

It was hard, very hard; but Silence was neither hurt

nor offended. "Faithful in one thing—faithful in all," she murmured. Claspings both her hands round his arm, she crept still closer to the true heart; all the truer and dearer because even its love for herself had failed to deaden any other lawful tenderness.

"Forgive me, my wife. You must not think that——"

"I think only of you, and of your bitter pain."

"It must be conquered, and shall, by-and-by."

"Or else—the tide may turn; who knows?"

"No, I have little hope of that. My mother has strong prejudices. In one sense she is, as they called her, a thorough Scotchwoman; a warm friend, a bitter enemy. No, no, do not give me hope of things changing. Better let us submit to the inevitable. It is inevitable now."

They walked a little way in sad silence, then Roderick broke out again.

"Did you hear what they said about Bella's husband? Poor Bella! I knew it would come to that; I told her so, but she would not believe me. She was dazzled, blinded, over-persuaded. Girls often are, I suppose. Perhaps I ought to have spoken out more thoroughly; but I hated speaking, they never would understand me. And then they worried me so. Still I should have done my duty to them, whether or not. I have not liked to vex you, my darling; but sometimes I have vexed myself for days together with the doubt if I had really done my duty to them all. I cannot forget them. My dearest—my very dearest always—you would not wish me to forget them?"

"No."

"Thank you!" And then, with another half-sob, he recovered himself. "Now we understand one another quite; so let us put it all aside. What is done we cannot undo; we would not if we could. Blood is thicker than water—especially with us Scotch—but love is beyond all, and stronger than all."

“When it is a righteous love. Ours would not have been such if it had made us do wrong. We did not do wrong. We had a right to marry if we chose. It made us happy, and it harmed no human being.”

Firm and fearless, holding the balance even, and as just to herself as she would have been to any other woman, Silence spoke out. His voice soothed and strengthened him as if it had been the voice of his own conscience.

“You are right, as I think you always are. After all, if it comes to the point, a man *must* ‘leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife.’ And she will cleave to him—even though he may try her a little? Do I?”

Man-like, he might have wished this fact denied; but Silence was too honest.

“Yes, dear,” and just then, as they came out of the bark wood into the moonlight, her pale face seemed to gain a sort of Abdiel-like look, angelic sternness mingled with its sweetness. “Yes, dear, you do try me very much sometimes, as no doubt I do you; as all married people must, more or less, try one another; but I love you—I love you!”

“Do you? I often wonder why,” Roderick answered, with that almost childlike humility and doubt of himself which was so pathetic, so winning.

“I love, because I honour; and, therefore, I am afraid of nothing; because nothing could make me cease to love you, except ceasing to honour. Me, myself, you might forsake, wound, torture, and, if it were for conscience’ sake, I should accept it all, and love you through all. But, if I ever came to despise you—as some women have come to despise their husbands—pity might last, and duty; but love would go dead out, and no power on earth would light it up again. But now—but now——”

She turned to him, her eyes shining with perfect trust—the very heart of love, love rooted in righteous-

ness. He turned too, and clasped her in his arms, with a passion such as even his lover-days had never felt. Then it was the restless craving after uncertain bliss. Now it was the deep content of satisfied union, each finding in the other more and more every day a perpetual refuge and rest.

"My mother told me I should 'get over' my love for you—and marry some other woman, who would do just as well. If it had been, and I had lost you, and had to live all my life without you! But now—Oh, Silence! what in the world should I do without you now?"

Without answering, she looked up at him, a sudden, strangely earnest look. Roderick, who had begun with a laugh, as if anxious to get back into the light common-place of life once more, put his arm round her.

"Are you tired? Let me help you. I think I could almost carry you. Lean on me, darling."

"Yes. I always do."

And so, half led, half carried—for she was evidently very weary—they came to their own door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HEAPING UP THE COALS.

"'THE bonnie blithe blink o' one's ain fireside,'" said Roderick, trying to sing, in which performance he so egregiously failed that his wife began to laugh at him.

"But how late Janet has kept the fire in," remarked she, as they watched the long, bright ray across the midnight lawn.

"Oh, you economical woman!" laughed Roderick. "Never mind—it's only once in a way. And we have

enjoyed ourselves—I was very happy at Symington. I like luxuries, as I like all pleasant things, but I can do without them. Now, there are certain things I could *not* do without.”

“What are they?”

“A peaceful, sunshiny, orderly home, and a wife to love me.”

She laughed merrily.

“Yes, it is a dear home, if we could only get into it.” For they had found the door fastened—a rare fact—and had been ringing and ringing, till at last Janet appeared, scared and flurried.

“Have you been asleep, Janet? Nothing wrong? No ghosts frightening you?” said Roderick, kindly.

“Na, na; but the leddy, she bade me steek the door.”

“What lady?”

“She came in a carriage, and said she was come to bide here. She’s been waiting in the parlour these twa hours.”

Roderick went hastily in, his wife following. There, still bonneted and shawled, dressed richly in velvet and fur, but with a face so haggard that it was no wonder even her brother did not at first recognize her—sat the “leddy.”

“Bella!”

“Yes, it’s me! You didn’t know me, I suppose?”

“Dear Bell! so glad to see you.” And he went over and kissed her affectionately. But Bella made no response.

“Stop a minute,” she said, in a hard, dry tone. “Don’t be too glad to see me. Ask your wife first. I’m not respectable. I’ve run away from my husband.”

Roderick started.

“Not with a man—oh no, thank you! I’ve had enough of men,” cried she, with the ghost of her old laugh—“only with a baby.”

She opened her fur cloak and discovered the white

long-clothes of a tiny—such a very tiny—infant, with such an old, withered, ugly little face! Nevertheless, Silence sprang to it and took it in her arms.

“Oh, you’re quite welcome to it, if you want it. I don’t, though it’s my own,” said Mrs. Thomson, with another laugh. “A month ago, when it was born, I hated the very sight of it, it was so like its father. Now—well, I endure it, that’s all! Isn’t it a miserable scrap of a thing?”

It certainly was; but in an instant Silence, throwing off her wraps, had sat down to warm its skinny stone-cold legs by the fire, with a look on her face that even her husband had never seen before.

“She seems born to be a mother, which I’m sure I never was; I always hated children. They look exactly like young frogs or toads. No doubt this will turn out a toad, and spit in my face, like—No, it’s a feminine, not a masculine, article, thank goodness! It can never grow up into a man, like *him*.”

“Do you mean your husband?” said Roderick, gravely.

“To be sure. The man I was fool enough to marry. Why didn’t my mother prevent me, as she tried to prevent your marriage? But mine was all right—or she thought so—as she thinks still. I’ve got a handsome house, horses and carriages, butler, three footmen, and a page. Didn’t I dodge them all cleverly? crept out in the dark of the afternoon, and took a tram—me, Mrs. Alexander Thomson—a common street tram—to the railway. What would Mr. Thomson have said!—Ha-ha-ha! I wish he knew it, if only just to vex him.”

Roderick sat down by his sister, grieved and sad. She was in such an excited state that he did not attempt a single question, but she went on rapidly talking.

“What a hunt there’ll be! Not that he cares for me, not two straws, but it isn’t respectable to have one’s wife running away. And they will think I have

gone mad, and killed the baby—he knew I hated it. But I'm not mad, I am quite in my sober senses, Rody—Is that a noise? I told the girl to bolt the front door. Somebody might come after me, though I don't think it. And they never would imagine I had come here to you."

"No," said Roderick, with involuntary bitterness. "Nevertheless, I being still your brother, and you having chosen to take refuge with me, you are safe. Be satisfied."

He laid his hand on her shoulder—she was shaking from head to foot—then, untying her bonnet and cloak, he made her lean back in the arm-chair.

Tears started to Bella's eyes. "Thank you; you were always kind to me, Rody, and you have got used to women's ways, I see. But don't be uneasy, I shall not faint, I never do. I'm tough, like mamma, or I should have been killed long ago. He was such a brute—you've no idea. That is, when he was drunk. Sober, he is—well, only a fool! I must have been blind—many silly girls are"—passing her hand wearily over her eyes—"but oh, Rody, fancy, to wake up after a week or two and find yourself tied for life to a drunkard and a fool! A brute too, as I say. Roderick"—clutching by the arm—"you, a man, with a wife of your own, and—yes, I guess—would you believe that the very day before that poor little wretch was born, he—he struck me?"

Roderick sprang to his feet.

"Don't get furious, you can do nothing. Nobody can. It's only drink. He's decent enough, just a fool at most, till he drinks. Then he's a devil; and I hate him as I hate the devil. It's right."

"Right or wrong, you must compose yourself," said the brother, himself making a violent effort at self-control. "My wife"—the instinctive appeal which had become habitual now—"my wife, come here."

Silence came, with the small bundle, so piteously

quiet, as if only half alive, in her arms. She had been going in and out of the room with it while they talked.

"Your bed is quite ready. Come, sister."

Bella, occupied with herself and her brother, had apparently forgotten her brother's wife. When she looked at Silence—the young mistress of the house, the woman with the womanly heart, which that forlorn babe seemed already to have found out, for it was fast asleep on her warm breast—this other woman, the miserable fine lady, the mother with the unmotherly soul, was struck with a mingled feeling, half surprise, half compunction.

"Yes, of course we are sisters. But I thought you would hate me—hate us all. It was Roderick I ran away to. I never thought of you."

"That was natural. But now, all that are his are mine—as is also quite natural. Come."

Bella grasped the offered hand and rose, saying, with a feeble laugh, "Rody, your wife must be an exceedingly good woman."

"*Cela va sans dire*, I hope," said he, trying to laugh, as he hurried them away upstairs, and sat down over the fire, thankful to be alone.

Most men dislike scenes, he more than most. The sight of his sister, the sound of her familiar voice, even down to the old boyish pet name, which belonged exclusively to those early days—his wife had never used it—affected him deeply.

Then, too, he was a man, with all a man's feeling about marital rights and duties. To find himself sheltering a runaway wife, though even his own sister, was very distasteful. Still every brotherly and manly emotion blazed up into righteous indignation at thought of Bella's wrongs.

"To strike her—actually strike her! Poor, poor girl! If I had been at hand—if she had had a brother to stand up for her!" And again his tender conscience smote him, as if he had not done half enough,

as if his passive acceptance of fate had been of itself an error. Should he resist now? Seeing that his sister had come to him for refuge, should he not hide her—that was impossible, nor, had it been possible, would he have stooped to any concealment—but openly protect her, against her husband, her mother, and all the world?

His head drooped in his hands to “think it over.” But he had grown unused to solitary thinking now. Wearily he looked round for the second self, always beside him, ready at least with the sympathy which is often as good as counsel, sometimes even better still.

It was almost an hour, quite the middle of the night, before Silence came in. She looked very pale and tired; but there was a deep joy in her face. With her light curls drooping over her white dressing-gown, she stood beside him, a vision of peace.

“Dear, you put me in mind of one of Fra Angelico’s angels.”

“But I have been doing no angel’s work, I have been washing baby. She looked so sweet, though she is so very, very small. Then I put her to bed beside her mother, who said she felt ‘quite safe and comfortable.’”

“Poor Bella! And you—I fear you are terribly worn-out, my darling?”

“Oh! no, I like looking after people. And you—you are glad to have one of your ‘ain folk’ under your roof? Is it not strange, after our talk to-night?”

“Very strange. And,” with a kind of sad apology, “you will be good to her? You don’t dislike her?”

“Dislike her?”

“No; there are likeable points about her, poor girl! And she has suffered so much! What shall we do with her? I have been wearying myself with thinking. Can she stay here?”

“Of course she can. We have contrived admirably; I rather like contriving. She brought no clothes for herself, but she did not forget her baby. She has a

great bundle of all things needful. I do believe she cares for it after all. She laughed, actually laughed, when she saw it so happy in its bath, which was our wash-tub. Only think! neither she nor I had ever washed a baby before; we were quite afraid; but Janet, who has had little brothers and sisters—six, I think—came to the rescue and helped us. Poor Janet, she was so proud!”

The simple, wholesome, domestic details—comedy neutralizing tragedy—Roderick laughed at them, and felt more comforted than he could tell. Then, turning to his wife, he pressed his lips on the small right hand, so soft, yet so busy and so strong.

“Coals of fire—coals of fire,” he murmured, much moved.

Silence did not at first understand the allusion, then she said,

“Yes, coals which melt and purify all sterling ore; that was how my father always explained the text. And who knows? She may be softened yet.”

“My mother?”

“I have been hearing all about her, how good she is, how generous and warm-hearted. And she was always so proud of you. She thought you ought to marry a countess at least! and you married only me! It really was a little hard for her.”

Roderick drew his wife down upon his knee—a “Fra Angelico,” but a mortal woman still—and buried his head on her shoulder. He did not speak, or nothing that she could hear, but she felt his tears.

The said “coals of fire,” when duly heaped up, warm others besides those they are meant to melt. Seldom had there been a brighter breakfast-table than that in the little parlour at Blackhall; even though Bella kept it a long time waiting—“which must never happen again,” said the young master to the mistress. But for once both forgave, and when Mrs. Alexander Thomson sailed in, her splendid clothes contrasting strangely

with her piteously white face, knelt with her brother and his wife round the family hearth, and then took her seat at the simple family table, all the misery outside, the dreary past, the doubtful future, could not take away a certain sense of peace.

But the simple breakfast of porridge and tea, bread, butter, and eggs, which always satisfied Roderick, had, to confess the truth, its difficulties with the guest. Despite her condescending smile, it was evidently not exactly what Mrs. Alexander Thomson was used to, and she felt that she was condescending. Also, after the first warm pleasure of meeting, both brother and sister became conscious of that curious sense of strangeness which, notwithstanding the closest tie of blood, rises up after a time between those whose lives have drifted wide apart, never to be united more. So much so that, by-and-by, conversation flagging, it was quite a relief to hear a feeble wail overhead.

"That's baby! What a bother she is! Could Janet go to her?"

"I will," said Silence, and vanished from the room.

"That wife of yours is the very kindest of women, Rody; but I hope she will not over-fatigue herself," remarked Bella, politely, though making no effort to prevent the fatigue. She always had a trick of never doing for herself what another was willing to do for her. And as she sat in the arm-chair, her feet on the fender, she looked the very picture of luxurious ease, except for the haggard, restless look so sad to see.

"I must leave you," Roderick said. "You know, Bella, I am a working man now, and get my own living."

"Yes, she told me. It must be very disagreeable."

"On the contrary, I rather like it. Daily bread, honestly earned, is far sweeter than the old idleness."

"Is it? Then I wish I could earn mine."

"You have no need, having your own independent fortune."

"Yes; *he* can't get it, mercifully; mamma tied it up

too safe. But neither can I, unless she chooses, and she will not choose. She will do nothing for me unless I stay with my husband, 'like a respectable woman,' as she says. I doubt if she will ever forgive my running away, even to my own brother."

"Who, I suppose, is not respectable," said Roderick, bitterly. "Nevertheless, she must be told. Shall I telegraph to her for you this morning?"

He spoke firmly, having already made up his mind to this: but he was not prepared for the agony of terror and misery which came over the unfortunate wife.

"No, no, no! If you tell her, she'll tell my husband, and he will come and fetch me. Not that he cares for me—not a pin! but only for the sake of appearances. Oh! Rody, tell nobody! Keep me safe—hide me! If you only knew what I have suffered!"

"My poor Bell, my Heather Bell!" said he, tenderly, using the old pet name he had invented for her in the days when they played together "among the broom." At that she quite broke down.

"Oh! I wish I were a girl again. I wish—I wish I had never married. Somebody once said to me that a woman has always a future until she is married, then she has none. Tied and bound—tied and bound for ever. And I am but seven and twenty."

That look, half appeal, half despair, it went to Roderick's heart, for he knew it was only too true. She was "tied and bound" with the chains she had herself riveted. Even her own brother, however he pitied her, was powerless to set her free.

"Only seven and twenty," she repeated. "Such a long life before me. How am I to bear it? 'Till death us do part.' And I can't die. And he—he won't die; people of that sort never do."

"Hush!" said Roderick, turning away aghast. "You don't know what you are saying."

"I do know it, only too well. Many a time, when,

after raving like a madman, he has sunk to a mere drunken dog, and lain asleep on his bed like a log of wood, I have thought of Jael and Sisera, or Judith and Holofernes, and others of those holy murderesses. If it would only 'please God to take him,' as our minister says. He would be much better in heaven. He couldn't get any drink there."

This ghastly mixture of the horrible and the ludicrous, added to what he knew of the utter recklessness of Bella's nature when roused, was almost too much for Roderick to bear. He looked instinctively round for the one who now was always at hand, helping him to bear everything; but Silence was still absent upstairs. Then, laying a firm hand on the poor violent woman, at once violent and weak—it is so often thus—he placed her back in her chair.

"You are talking nonsense, Bella; you know you are; the most arrant nonsense, or worse. Don't be afraid, you have a brother still, who will do his best to take care of you; but you must let me do it in the right way. Nothing cowardly, nothing underhand. Your mother, at least, must be told where you are. My wife says so. She and I were talking it over this morning."

"Very kind!"

"It was kind, and wise, too," was the grave reply. "Silence is the wisest woman I know."

"And I the most foolish! It looks like it. Very well. Cast me off if you like. Turn me out of doors. I'll take the child and go."

But it was only an hysterical impulse, which ended in a flood of hysterical tears.

Utterly bewildered and perplexed, Roderick went to the foot of the stairs and called "Silence," in the sharpest tone he had used since his marriage.

"Why do you leave me? You know I can't do without you," he said. Then added, as she descended, with the wailing child still in her arms, "It is hard

for you too, my wife. Our peaceful days are all done."

"Not quite," she said, smiling—it was wonderful the sweetness of her smile whenever she had that baby in her arms—"I see," when she perceived Bella, and heard her frantic sobbing. "My friend" (the loving *mon ami* which she still used sometimes), "you are of no use here. Leave her to me—women understand women. She will be all right soon. Take your hat and go. Outside work is quite hard enough for you. Good-bye, my dearest—dearest!"

She lifted up her face to be kissed—the pale, firm, peaceful face, such a contrast to the other one—opened the door, shut it after him, and watched him safe away. Then, with a great sigh of relief, she went back to her unfortunate sister-in-law.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SHAMING THE DEVIL.

WHEN Roderick came home at night, not without a certain masculine apprehensiveness of domestic worry plainly written on his face, he found the household settled into surprising peace.

In the first place baby was not crying, but asleep, Janet's young sister being installed as temporary nursemaid, and a very clever one; and baby's mother, her grand silk dress replaced by a soft woollen one of Silence's—the two women were nearly the same height—sat by the parlour fire. Idle certainly—Roderick remembered how Bella would sit for an hour at a time "toasting her toes," with her hands before her—but apparently quiet and content. He went up and kissed

her with brotherly affection, saying something about his pleasure in having her in his house.

"Then you'll not send me back to mine? You did not telegraph to mamma, as you said you would?"

"No."

"Nor write?"

"How could I write to my mother?" said Roderick, with a mixture of pride and sadness. "No; whatever is done, you must do it, not I. We will talk of it after dinner." For he saw that Silence had given herself the unwonted trouble of late dinner, just to make Bella feel things "more like her own ways." It was a little matter, but it touched the young husband's heart. While he sat talking to his sister, his eyes were perpetually following the flitting figure of one who never sat still—never knew what idleness was till she had done everything for everybody.

"That wife of yours makes me so comfortable," said Bella, benignly. "And she is so clever, so inventive, really quite a treasure in a small household. In mine now, I never could do anything myself, as she does. It must be very pleasant."

"Only, perhaps, rather fatiguing. My wife, come here and rest, just for five minutes." And, as he kissed the tired face, he felt sure that the "comfort" which Bella so enjoyed had cost Silence something.

Dinner passed, and the half-hour afterwards, during which Roderick tried hard to admire his new niece, and to make things as easy and cheerful as possible with his sister.

When Silence—always Silence—had put baby to bed the three gathered round the cosy fire, listening to the howl of the wind and the patter of the rain outside, which only made more peaceful the deep peace within.

"What a quiet, pleasant life you must have here, you two!" said Bella, with a sigh.

They looked at one another and smiled.

"And are you so very poor? What do you live upon?"

"First, there is Blackhall. Then my wife has her income which Cousin Silence left her, and I earn mine. We put the two together—marriage should be a fair partnership."

"But it is not," broke in Bella; "it is mere slavery, unbearable slavery. Oh! that mine was ended! Oh! that I were free!"

Roderick took a hand of wife and sister.

"Let us have a little talk together, and face our position, which is not an easy one. Bella, what do you mean to do?"

"I don't know."

"Then what do you wish me to do?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. But, oh! Rody, why bother me, when I am so comfortable?"

Just the old Bella—easy, pleasure-loving—dwelling only in the present moment, acting entirely on her impulses, of which both the good and the bad ones were equally shallow, equally transitory. There are many such women, who please a great many men—as she had done; who generally find some one or other to bear their burdens for them, and go through life, as she expressed it, quite "comfortably."

As Roderick looked from one to the other of the two beside him, he thought—no, he loyally refused to think—-but he instinctively clasped his wife's hand tighter in his own. Small as it was, and tender, that was the hand for a man to cling to, ay, and lean on—as, soon or late, men must lean on women, when trouble comes.

"Bella," he said, earnestly, "do you at all understand——"

"I understand that I am henceforth what is called a 'grass widow,'" interrupted she, with her reckless laugh. "Mamma must keep me, or give me my money and let me keep myself. My husband will never give me a halfpenny. And Silence says I ought not to ask

him. She has the very oddest notions, that wife of yours."

Roderick pressed the hand he held.

"Have you two been talking together?"

"A little."

"And you have told her everything?"

"Everything—made a clean breast of it. A pretty story, isn't it, Silence? But it's at an end now, thank God!" said Bella, setting her teeth together. "Even a worm will turn at last."

"Shall you not go back to your husband? that is, if he will take you back."

"Trust him for that! He knows on which side his bread is buttered; all the Thomsons do. They were glad enough to catch me, a bright, clever, pretty girl—yes, I was both clever and pretty once, my dear—to be a sort of care-taker or keeper over him; he needs a keeper when he is drunk. And a wife is the best sort of one—saves appearances. Thomsons as well as Jardines would do anything in the world to save ppearances."

Roderick made no answer. He knew it was true. The sight of his sister had brought back the memory of many a boyish struggle, Quixotic as vain, against the predominant spirit of the family; a family in which the first question that arose was never "Is it right?" or "Is it wrong?" but only "Is it expedient?"

This law of expediency, not righteous prudence, but petty, worldly wisdom, had been at the root of Bella's marriage. Those who had had the making of it, would they not on the same principle do their best to prevent its being unmade? He felt sure his mother would. Anything, everything, she would sacrifice rather than be "talked about;" as the world would talk, if there was a public separation between Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson; two people who, in their own opinion, and that of their respective families, held such a very important place in society.

He knew his mother and the rest would view this catastrophe, as they had viewed the marriage which resulted in it, solely from the stand-point of society. No higher law than what the world would think, and say, ever actuated or guided them. In old times, he had dimly guessed this secondarily, and chiefly by its effect on his silent, patient father; but now, when he himself had come to man's estate, and viewed things with his own eyes, he saw it clearly.

Still this affair was, as all such cases are, most complicated and difficult; and in it Roderick's own position was not the least painful. To act a brother's part towards his poor sister, he did not shrink from that; but to aid and abet a runaway wife in concealing herself from her husband was most galling, not only to his pride, but to his sense of honour. Yet, to thrust her from him into hopeless misery was worse than cruel, dangerous: knowing her temperament, which was to escape from present pain as foolishly as a child does, at any future risk and cost. The medium course, to come boldly forward, and insist upon the separation she desired, was equally difficult and responsible for any brother, being himself a man and a husband.

Roderick looked at his own wife, growing closer to him every day, in the mutual dependence which so gently and naturally replaces passion, and gives to both that sense of ineffable rest, of unseparated joys, and divided cares.

"Bella," he said, in a moved voice, "do you know, my dear, exactly what you are doing, or wishing to do? Remember what your Bible says, 'What God hath joined, let no man put asunder.'"

"But God did not join us, it was the devil, I think," she answered, with a bitter laugh. "And, if all other help fails, the devil shall help me to get rid of him."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. Wait till I'm driven desperate. I am nearly, already. If only I could tear off this." She

took hold of her marriage-ring and made as though she would throw it into the fire. "If at any price, at any cost, I could be Bella Jardine again, and never more set eyes upon that brute, that fool, that——"

"Hush!" said Silence. "He is baby's father."

"Ah, that's it—that's the misery. I don't hate my child. I did at first, but not now; it's nature, I suppose. Besides, she is my child, all I have of my own; and even that is half his, if he chose to claim her. Oh, Rody, what must I do?—what can I do?"

It was, indeed, a piteous strait. The one false step, marriage unconsecrated by love, almost as great a sin as love unconsecrated by marriage, had brought its own punishment with it. The young pair, to whom these things appeared as a ghastly nightmare, scarcely comprehensible as a daylight reality, instinctively drew closer together, while they regarded the hapless woman, who had, as she truly said, no future. A loathing wife, an unthankful mother, what future could she have, either in herself or in "the world," for which she had sacrificed so much and gained so little?

What could she do? As she put the question, her despairing eyes supplied the answer. Nothing!

"I know very little about these things," said Roderick, sadly; "but I believe there are two ways of parting man and wife—by divorce, enabling both to marry again; and by judicial separation, which keeps them bound for life. But oh, the pain, the scandal! Think of your child; think, too, of your mother!"

While using this argument he knew its futility. Whether from disposition or circumstances, Bella had always been that rather rare character among women, a woman who thinks only of herself. With a perplexed longing for help, for counsel, her brother turned to the other woman beside him.

"What does my wife say?"

"I don't care what she says—what anybody says," cried Bella, violently. "I will get rid of my husband

somehow. I have no love for him; I never had. It is a simple question of money. If I run away, how am I to keep myself and the child? She says—that voice of wisdom there—that, if I leave him, I ought not to accept a halfpenny from him. Very well, get mamma to maintain me, or else I'll maintain myself."

"How?"

"I don't know or care. It may not be for long. He will drink himself to death one of these days."

Roderick turned away in horror, but Silence laid a firm, stern hand on her sister-in-law's arm.

"One word more such as that, and we will neither of us help you."

Bella shrank into submission, even a little shame, then burst into piteous entreaties.

"Oh! Rody, do not be hard upon me! I have nobody in the world to come to but you. How am I to get rid of my husband? Not to harm him—I don't wish to harm him—only let me escape from him. I will do it, and I'm right; your wife says so."

Roderick started.

"Yes, she is quite right," said Silence, not lifting her eyes, but speaking, as her husband knew she could speak sometimes, with unmistakable decision.

"My wife is a daring woman to say such a thing."

"Am I?"

She looked up a minute with a quivering lip, and did not attempt to put back her hand, which he had let go; but folded her fingers together, after a way she had, as if to give herself strength, when she had any difficult or painful thing to do.

"This is very strange advice for my wife—I hope, a happy wife—to give to my sister. Your reasons?"

"They are not easy to explain, but I will try." She stopped, then, with a firm, clear voice, went on again. "If Bella had only herself to sacrifice she might do it, though I am not sure. It is a sin against heaven to condone sin, even in one's own husband. But, in this

and similar cases, a woman does not sacrifice herself alone. There are others upon whom the sins of the father may descend, generation after generation. She must think of them. She is responsible to God for them. If I were in Bella's place," her voice sank almost to a whisper—she turned deadly pale, and then flushed crimson all over her face—"if I were in your sister's place, I would die rather than be a mother to a drunkard's children."

There was a total silence. Bella, accustomed to make self the stand-point of all her opinions and acts, perhaps could scarcely understand; but Roderick did. Startled he might be, yet there was something in his wife's stern righteousness which he could not gainsay. As he looked on that small sweet face, so sweet, yet so strong, he saw in her, for the first time, not merely his wife, but the woman, the conjoint and yet separate existence, intrusted by God and nature with far more than her own petty life, inheriting—and conscious that she inherited—the destiny which came to her from sacred Eve, "mother of all living."

Man as he was, with a man's natural leaning to the masculine side, with a man's natural blindness to much that women see by instinct, still his wife's words smote him with a certain respect, even awe. That she had strength to say them at all, she so timid, so shy, so reticent, proved how deeply she must have thought and felt on the matter.

"Dear," he said, holding out his hand, "if all women were like you—especially if all sons had mothers like you—there would be fewer bad men in this world."

She answered nothing; but her whole face brightened in recognition of what is to women like her as sweet as being loved—honoured. And so, without more arguments, all three seemed tacitly to accept the position which poor Bella had so fiercely insisted upon, that, for her, married life—or rather that unholy

travesty of marriage which had been her self-inflicted doom—was over and done for ever.

“Let her live as a widow,” Silence said. “Her life is lost, I know that, but let the sacrifice end here. Let her not submit to be the ruin of other lives.”

“But she may be the ruin of her husband’s, whom she took ‘for better for worse.’ How do you answer that?”

Silence shrank back, full of pain. “Oh, it is difficult, so difficult, to see the right; worse, perhaps, to do it. Still, still—No,” and again the strong, clear Abdiel look came into her eyes. “No, there can be but one right and one wrong, alike for men and for women. When love is dead, and respect also, there comes a time when duty also ceases. She must leave him. Think, Roderick, if the case was reversed? Would you, or any other husband, keep as mistress of your house, as mother of your children, a drunken woman?”

“God forbid!”

“Then God forbid it to your sister, too. Drunkenness, dissoluteness, anything by which a man degrades himself and destroys his children, gives his wife the right to save them and herself from him, to cut him adrift, and be free. Poverty, contumely, loneliness, let her endure all. Pity her lot, if you will, but that she should ignore it, accept it, submit to it, above all, let the innocent suffer from it—never! Bella tells me that the law gives her possession of her child for seven years. My advice is, let her take it in her arms and fly—anywhere, so that her husband cannot get her back, or make the law follow her. Nay, if I were she, I would defy the law: I would hide myself at the world’s end, change my name, earn my bread as a common working woman, but I would save my child, and go.”

As Silence stood, holding close to her breast the poor babe—she had fetched it, and was walking up and down the room with it, for no one else seemed to

have patience with the miserable, sickly, wailing creature—she looked the very incarnation of womanhood in its highest form, motherhood; absolutely calm, absolutely fearless, as mothers ought to be.

Roderick, touched with many new thoughts, which come crowding to a man when he has ceased to be merely a young man, absorbed in himself alone, and begun to look into the far future, the future of those that may yet bless or curse him for his part therein—Roderick caught her arm as she passed, and drew her to his side.

“Perhaps you are right—I do not quite know. We must take time to think. But just at this moment you must give baby to its own mother, and come and sit down by me. Remember, you are mine!”

“Yes.”

She obeyed, apparently without a thought of disobeying, for the authority was that of love, and the voice, though decisive, was thrilled with unspeakable tenderness. “Mine!” Ay, she acknowledged the possession—the subjection. You could see by her look that she would have served him like a slave; but only because he was himself—her just and righteous lord. Never for one moment would she have submitted to unrighteousness, or to tyranny.

“What a fierce little woman this is!” he whispered, with a smile. “I never could have believed it of her.”

“Oh, forgive me! It is because I am so happy—so happy! that I can understand what it must be to be miserable.”

But Bella’s misery, however deeply it had moved her sister-in-law, did not seem to have overwhelmed herself. She began talking over all her affairs, volubly and freely; silent endurance was not her gift. Once having got her brother to agree with her in the opinion which, at any rate, she held to-day, though it might change to-morrow, she became quite cheerful, and

planned her future life as a "widow bewitched" with an eagerness that a little astonished Silence.

"If mamma would only give me some money, I could spend the summer in Switzerland—the winter in Paris. I always wanted to travel abroad for awhile; and to be travelling without him, able to go where I liked, and to do what I wanted—— Oh!"—a sigh of intense relief—"Rody, you must try to persuade mamma to give me plenty of money."

"You forget—" he began, gravely.

"Dear me, yes! I had forgotten all about it. But never mind, Rody dear," in a coaxing tone; "can't you put your wrongs in your pocket and write to her for me? You always wrote such capital letters; and she would listen to you when she listened to nobody else. Her only son—worth all her daughters put together—at least, she thought so. Come—do it! This morning I objected to her being told where I was, but now I see it must be. You'll save me the trouble of it by writing to her yourself?"

Poor Bella! she was always ready to lay her burdens upon anybody who was willing to bear them. He knew that, and yet when he looked at her and heard her familiar caressing voice, the good brother felt again like the little boy who had carried his big sister's parcels, flowers, garden-tools, even her doll sometimes, when she got tired of it.

"I cannot write to my mother," he said, with a sad earnestness, "but I will telegraph to her in your name, saying where you are, and that you wish to stay with me—you really do wish it?—till something can be settled between you and your husband. Reconciliation; or, if that cannot be, separation."

"Separation—only that—*she* says so," cried Bella, always ready (another peculiarity—how strangely, cruelly clear they all came out now!)—ready and eager to lay the responsibility of her doings and opinions upon somebody else.

"What I say is," Silence answered, "that if your husband is as bad as you aver, and if you have that hatred to him which you profess to have, there is no righteous course for you but separation. But you must not wander about the world as you propose. Live simply and quietly. Be a real mother, and take care of your child. You can never be quite desolate with a child."

Bella shrugged her shoulders.

"You have the most extraordinary ideas! But you are a good woman—a very good woman. I shall tell mamma so. It shall not be the worse for you to have been kind to me, my dear," she added, with a certain touch of feeling, and then plunged back into her own affairs, which absorbed her so entirely, and which she expected every one else to be absorbed in too.

Far into the night they talked, for Mrs. Alexander Thomson, who never rose early, was accustomed to sit up late; and besides, she seemed to take a certain satisfaction in discussing her misfortunes. It was like a person with an ugly wound, or a remarkably severe illness, who at last comes even to take a sort of pride in the same. The self-respect, reticence, and silence of a broken heart, were not hers at all, though unquestionably she had been a cruelly-wronged woman. Taking advantage of her folly, worldliness, and love of wealth and position, her husband's family had married him to her, just to shift from themselves the burden of him—a man who, as she truly said, "wanted a keeper" rather than a wife. She had walked into the snare open-eyed, but it had been a snare nevertheless; and Roderick, as he heard her revelations, felt his blood boil with that righteous indignation, that instinctive chivalry in defence of the injured and the weak, which, if every strong man felt as he ought to feel, there would be no need for feeble women to vex the world with clamours about their rights or their wrongs. The

truly noble of either sex never care to put forward either the one or the other.

While Bella talked, Roderick and his wife were almost entirely silent; and when, afterwards, day after day passed by, and no answer came to the telegram, or to a second, which, weary of waiting, she sent after it, still they made as few comments as possible on what now began seriously to perplex them both.

Mrs. Thomson did not seem in the least perplexed. She made herself extremely comfortable, without much regarding the comfort of other people, exacted a great deal of attendance, and amused herself with suggesting many luxuries hitherto unknown at Blackhall.

"No, there's no fear of my husband's coming to fetch me," she said one day in answer to a question of Roderick's. "He is a Richerden man all over—hates the country—would never face a Highland pass in winter; and if he came he would run away again. You haven't big enough rooms, or grand enough dinners for him. By-the-by, Blackhall is a rather cold house, Silence; and a little gloomy, you'll allow. You ought to keep up good fires; and, I think, if I were you, I would have entirely new curtains and carpets before next winter."

Silence smiled. It was one of the numerous little remarks which she had already learned quietly to smile at without showing offence, even if she felt any.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST CHANCE.

As days sped on, the constant presence of an idle woman in a busy house, a luxurious woman in a not rich house, had, to say the least, its difficulties. The master of Blackhall did not feel them—his wife took care of that; but the mistress did. Many a time would Roderick notice how tired she looked; and why was it so? Had she not Bella to help her? women were always company for one another at home while the men were away. His wife's only answer was that silent smile. The fact that her guest was his sister tied her tongue, even with her own husband.

"It is not for very long," she said every morning to herself, and went through the day's work as well as she could. At night she would often creep away, leaving the brother and sister together, and mount to the attic (which Bella had insisted should be made into a nursery, "because there one can't hear the little wretch crying") to sit with the child on her lap—the ugly, elfish, troublesome child, doomed to disease and weakness from its cradle—and wonder, with an agony of pity, how it would fight through life, or whether, after all, God's mercy might not be best shown by taking it back again out of a world where nobody wanted it, and into which it had never asked to be born. A great mystery—which none can solve.

She and Bella were always friendly, even affectionate, in a sort of way; but, nevertheless, she often felt weary, so weary; like a person who had to speak all day long in a foreign tongue. At least, such was the moral effect of her sister's companionship. The two women might have been brought up in two hemispheres. Their

views of life were so altogether different that they could not understand one another's language at all. Still this must be borne; and it was borne. Things might have been a great deal worse.

Only when she heard her husband's restless call for her all over the house, and noticed a nervous irritation in him whenever he was left long alone with his sister, Silence began to wish for some sign of their suspense being over. Evidently, both mother and husband had discarded the runaway wife, either on her own account, or that of the brother with whom she had taken refuge.

"We row in the same boat now, Rody," Bella said one morning, when the seventh day's post had gone by. "I don't care; do you? Clearly you will have to adopt us as waifs and strays, both me and the child. I'll call it after you, 'Roderica,' or perhaps 'Silence.'"

"No, not Silence," he answered, hastily. "I beg your pardon, but there can be only one Silence in the world for me," taking lovingly his wife's hand. "Advise with her, Bella; she will be sure to suggest the wisest and best thing."

But when the sisters-in-law talked things over, which they had full opportunity of doing, for a deep fall of Christmas snow shut them in, and made Blackhall impregnable, even to more courageous and less luxurious folk than Mr. Alexander Thomson, they came to no satisfactory conclusions. Though strong on the question of her wrongs, and her corresponding rights, Mrs. Thomson seemed to have a very feeble idea of her duties. To any course which involved the slightest trouble, or exertion, or self-denial, she always offered innumerable mild but insurmountable objections.

"It's all very fine to tell me that if I cut my husband adrift, and refuse to live with him, I can't expect him to maintain me, and must maintain myself—how can I maintain myself? It isn't genteel for women to work, and it isn't pleasant either. You talk of independence and all that, and the comfort my child will

be to me; but I don't like children; and I'm sure, Silence, I shall never enjoy being poor. You know,"—she glanced round the old-fashioned room, and helped herself with an air of exemplary condescension to the best dish of that meal which had been considered dinner, but which she always called lunch—"you, my dear, who have always been accustomed to that sort of thing, may find it easy, but I should not."

"No," said Silence, absently. She was thinking, not of herself, but of her husband—of his long hard-working days spent at the mill, amidst surroundings not too pleasant, and with the perpetual whirr of machinery in his ears; and to sensitive organizations incessant noise is of itself a torment almost indescribable, though unexplainable to those who do not understand this. He did, and felt it too, yet he never complained. Even now, as Silence watched him come up the brae, with somewhat lagging steps, she knew he would enter with a cheerful face, and, when he had "put off the mechanic and put on the gentleman," as he said laughing one day to Bella, be his own tender self to both of them. For the common notion, that a man may justifiably vent all his business worries on his womankind at home, did not seem as yet to have occurred to Roderick Jardine. Whatever vexed him out-of-doors, in-doors he was always the kind, pleasant master and husband—always, under all circumstances, the gentleman.

"Yes, I like my work," he answered, when his sister inquired about it, which she rarely did, evidently considering it a topic which had better be ignored. "And I like working. Once, Bell, I was a great idler; but *she* has cured me of that. If I had ten thousand a year even, I could never be idle any more."

Sitting down beside his wife, he leaned his head against her—a tired head it was: and laid on hers one of his brown hands, not such handsome hands as they used to be when they did nothing. She clasped it

fondly, though she said not a word; she too was not given to complaining. Besides, hard as things were both for him and for her, to see him thus, doing cheerfully what he did not like (through all his tender fictions she knew he could not like the mill very much); fighting with hardships, submitting to poverty, and proudly conquering any false shame about either; taking up his daily burden and carrying it, without a murmur or reproach—she felt—yes, amidst all her pain, she felt something as the mediæval women must have done—the noble ladies who buckled on their good knights' armour and sent them forth to battle—to live or die, as God willed, but never to be conquered, never ceasing to fight, like true knights, to their last breath.

But Bella could not understand this sort of thing at all. She shrugged her shoulders, and raised her brows.

"It's an odd taste, Rody, but you always were so odd. To be out at work all day, and come home, tired and dirty, hungry and cold, and then say you 'like' it!—I wouldn't be you for the world, nor Silence neither—shut up in this lonely place all the year round. No wonder mamma would not come to Blackhall; it would never have suited her at all," and Bella laughed at the bare idea. "But I ought not to find fault with the poor old house, for I may have to come down to it after all. No telegram or letter?"

"Nothing."

"Well, don't look so grave about it. Plainly they have all cut me, left me to fall back upon you. Will you take me in, Rody? I'll sell my jewels—I brought a lot with me, you know—and pay you for my keep. When my money is all gone, you can turn me out to starve; only it wouldn't be creditable to either Thomsons or Jardines if Mrs. Alexander Thomson and her baby had to starve."

"What nonsense you talk!" said Roderick, turning away, and changing the conversation at once.

But that night, when the household was all gone to bed, and they three sat over the fire, listening to the wind howling and the sleet pattering against the panes, he resumed the subject and, somewhat to Silence's surprise, began, very tenderly, but with unmistakable decision, to arrange what his sister should do. His arrangement it was—not his wife's—as he plainly said, thereby taking from Silence the weight of a difficult and painful thing.

“I will not promise to keep you always, Bella, for I think husband and wife are better left alone together; but we shall not turn you out, my poor girl, whatever comes,” said he, laying a brotherly hand on Bella's shoulder. “The little we have—you see how little it is!—you shall share, till something can be arranged between you and your husband. Then, with what you have of your own—my mother will surely pay it over to you!—we will find you a home close by us. In the manse, perhaps, where I heard to-day there are two vacant rooms.”

“What! to be shut up in a miserable country lodging, with only baby and nurse! Dreadful!”

“Not quite so dreadful as your other alternative—starving. And, Bella, we must look things in the face. If you have no marriage settlement, and my mother keeps her money in her own hands during her lifetime, and both she and your husband cast you off, you have only your brother to fall back upon. I am not rich now, you know that; but you know, also, that, rich or poor, I should never let my sister ‘starve!’”

“No, a thousand times, no!” cried Silence, taking her hand—for Bella, seeing this was no joking matter, had suddenly taken fright, and, as usual, burst into tears. “It may not come to that; but if it does, believe me, poverty is not so bad as it seems. You shall never want for love. You will live close beside us; our home will be open to you; and the child—the

children " (in a timid whisper) " shall grow up together. Oh ! we shall be very happy, never fear."

" No, no ; I should be miserable !" And she sobbed and moaned, and talked of " cruelty," " hard usage," wished she was " dead and out of the way ;" the usual bitter outcries against fate of those who, having made their own fate what it is, have not the strength to bear it.

Deeply grieved, and not a little wounded, Roderick sat beside his sister, his wife not interfering—who could interfere ?—till Bella's misery had a little subsided, and then said, quietly,

" Now, we will speak no more to-night ; but to-morrow I will consult a lawyer and find out the right and wrong of the case, and your exact position with regard to your husband. Will that do ? "

" No, no," she said. " Don't be in such a hurry. Wait till I make up my mind. It is so difficult to make up one's mind always. Money isn't everything, as Silence says, but I never had her enthusiasm for poverty. And the drink—which to her is such a horror—why, Alexander Thomson isn't the only drunkard in Scotland. Perhaps I might put up with him a little longer."

Both Roderick and his wife looked exceedingly surprised. They made no remark—they always had carefully avoided making any remarks to Bella about her husband. But when she was gone, and they stood alone together over the dying fire, they spoke of her with a pity deeper than either had ever yet expressed.

" Mark my words ; she will go back to him yet. Do you think, my wife, she would be right or wrong ? "

" Wrong ! " was the answer, clear and firm.

" Why ? "

" Because she will do it neither for love, nor duty, nor even pity, but only for expediency. Think ! the horror of a married life, begun and continued for the sake of expediency ? "

Silence looked up in her husband's face—her husband whom she was ready to live for, however hard a life, ready to die for, and he knew it.

"You are right," he said. "And yet both erred—both ought to suffer."

"But only they—not others. Not innocent children. And, we know well, 'the sins of the parents shall be visited on the children even unto the third and fourth generation.'" She spoke in a low, solemn voice. "I told your sister once, and I shall tell her again if she asks me, that the woman who, being married to a bad man, makes him the father of child after child, is little better than those children's murderess."

"Poor Bella—poor Bella!" said the brother, mournfully, but he did not gainsay a single word.

CHAPTER XXX.

HEAVEN OR HELL?

NOTWITHSTANDING her brother's compassion, Bella did not seem at all to deserve, or to desire, the epithet "poor." She appeared at breakfast next morning in the best of spirits, nor did she fall into her usual half-hour of despondency after the post went by. She watched the weather with a slight anxiety, but that was all. She even began to take an interest in Blackhall affairs, and especially in an invitation for New Year's Eve at Symington, which her brother and sister were discussing together.

"Of course you will go, and take me with you? I had no idea, Silence, that you had such grand friends! Do you often see them?"

"Not very often. It is a good long way to walk, and besides——"

“Walk! You don’t mean to say your husband lets you walk?”

A sharp quiver of pain passed over Roderick’s face. “I let her, as I am obliged to let her do many things which cut me to the heart, but we bear them. Bella, when you and I were children, we had no need to think of money, now I have; very much need. If I hired a carriage and took my wife and you to Symington, it would cost me fifteen shillings, and my earnings are just two pounds a week. You perceive? Let us say no more.”

They did not, for Bella afterwards owned to being “quite frightened” by her brother’s manner; but several times that morning she fell into brown studies, as if something were secretly vexing her, and in the afternoon was suddenly missing for an hour, having gone herself—“for the good of her health,” she said—to the village, and, as by mere chance they afterwards discovered, to the post-office.

Had she, after refusing so often, at last written to her mother? They did not like to ask, and she did not tell; but, being not at all of a reticent nature, she soon betrayed that something was on her mind. For three days after that she was in a restless, slightly irritable condition, very difficult to please in trifles, and noticing more than ever, in that annoyingly condescending way she had, the weak points of the establishment.

“And so Cousin Silence left you the house just as it stands, my dear? as it must have been in papa’s time, of course? Well, no wonder mamma did not care for it. Such poky rooms, such shabby old furniture! In your place I would have turned out every stick, and refurnished it in modern style from top to bottom. But you can do this by-and-by, if you stay here.”

“I have no wish to go.”

“Probably not, a quiet soul like you; it suits you

exactly. But my brother, you surely would not keep him shut up all his days at Blackhall, he who would be an ornament in any society? Do think better of it. Poke him up, make him push himself forward in the world and get rich—there's nothing like money, after all. If mamma saw him well-off, so that he could come back to Richerden, and live in good Richerden style, such as we have all of us been brought up to, she might forgive him; who knows?"

"Who knows?" repeated Silence, assenting. She would have been amused, but for the sting which Bella's most good-natured words often carried—unintentionally;—it was simply that the woman could not understand.

"Just think of what I say," continued Mrs. Thomson, as she gazed lazily out of the window, down the winding glen, at the end of which curled upwards, in a fairy-like pillar, the smoke of the mill. "I wonder you can endure the sight of it—that horrid place where Rody works all day, Rody that used to be such a gentleman."

"He is a gentleman!" said the young wife, with a flash of the eye. "And I do not dislike—I like the mill. It has helped to make him what he is, and show him what he could do; and he does it, does it cheerfully, for me. Bella, if I die—and I may die, who can tell? this spring"—with a sudden appeal in her eyes to this woman, so unlike herself, but yet a woman—"if I die, remember we were perfectly happy, my husband and I. We never have regretted anything, never shall regret anything, except perhaps that his mother—— I always feel so for mothers."

Her voice broke with emotion, but it was an emotion quite thrown away. Bella scarcely heard what her sister-in-law was saying. She sat listening, as she had listened a good many times the last few days, to any sound outside.

"Hark! What is that? Carriage-wheels?"

"Possibly. We do have visitors sometimes, even here," said Silence, with a smile.

But Bella heeded her not. She ran to the window and watched, in a tremor of anxiety, the arrival: a large, handsome carriage, with post-horses and postilion, and two liveried footmen behind, coming slowly up to the door.

"It is! it is our carriage! Perhaps she has come herself, poor dear mamma! I did not tell you, my dear, but I wrote to mamma and said, if she thought it best, I would come home. And I suppose she has sent for me. Look there!—look there! No, it is not mamma—oh, God help me! it is my husband."

Horror, disgust, despair, were written on every feature of her face, as she watched Mr. Alexander Thomson descend, leaning on his two footmen, and in a loud, imperious voice inquire, "if Mrs. Thomson were within?" How she shuddered, the miserable woman who had not had strength to free herself from her misery. But this was its last outcry. In another minute her worldly upbringing, her love of ease and luxury, and a certain pride to preserve appearances, asserted their sway.

"Yes, that is our carriage; isn't it a nice one? And he has brought it to fetch me. Well, he is not so bad, after all. I suppose he wants to get me back in time for the New Year—the Thomsons always have a grand family gathering at the New Year. They are a highly respectable family, and in an exceedingly good position, I assure you, my dear," added she, with a mixture of haughtiness and deprecation, as if she thought her sister would blame her. But Silence merely said,

"Shall I go and receive your husband, or will you?"

"You! No! perhaps I had better do it myself. Send him in here; I'll manage my own affairs."

And she did manage them—how, was never accurately known. But half-an-hour afterwards Mr. and

Mrs. Alexander Thomsom were seen sitting together on the drawing-room sofa, as comfortable as if they had never been separated.

And most likely half the world would say the wife was quite right in thus fulfilling to the letter her marriage-vow, condoning everything, shutting her eyes to everything, making believe that wrong was right, and going back in the most respectable manner to her husband's house, there to sustain the character of a blameless British matron. She did it "for the best," as many women would argue, or "for the sake of the child," which is the argument of hundreds more who deliberately continue in wealthy dishonour; for what dishonour can be worse than marriage without respect and without love?

But, as the proverb says, Bella had "made her bed and must lie on it." Nobody had a right to interfere or advise. Silence never attempted to do either. She sat with the child on her lap, the poor, pitiful little creature whom she had grown fond of and was almost sorry to lose, till she was sent for into the drawing-room, and then, to make things less difficult, she entered with baby in her arms.

Its father civilly noticed it and her, and there was a slight gleam of pleasure in his dull, fishy eyes, as if he were proud, after a fashion, of his good-looking, clever wife, and of his new paternal dignity.

"Nice little thing! And Mrs. Thomson tells me you have been so kind to it and to her, Mrs. Jardine. Accept my thanks, my very best thanks. It was quite a good idea of my wife's, this—this coming to you for change of air."

"Yes, Blackhall is an exceedingly healthy place," said Bella, with a laugh, her old careless laugh. If there was a ring of mockery, even contempt in it, the man was too dull to find it out. He eyed her with extreme respect, nay, admiration, and put his arm round her waist with a pompous demonstrativeness, as

if to prove to all the world what an exceedingly happy couple they were.

The tragedy had melted into genteel comedy, nay, almost into broad farce, were it not for the slender line that so often is drawn between the ludicrous and the ghastly.

"I suppose we had better leave at once. By changing horses, we shall post fast enough to reach home to-night, and go to your father's on New Year's Eve," said Bella, hurriedly. "So, my dear Silence, we won't wait till my brother comes home. Mr. Thomson is decent enough now," she added, in a whisper, "but by-and-by, after dinner—I don't want Rody to see him after dinner. We shall post all the way," she said, aloud, "and by midnight we shall be at home."

"Where I hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Jardine," continued Mr. Thomson, with ponderous politeness. "Assure your husband that he will be always welcome at our place, and I'll give him the best glass of wine, or whiskey if he likes it, to be found in all Scotland. And—and——"

"Come away, Silence. I'll get my things ready, and the child's, in ten minutes. Make haste!"

But even when the two sisters were alone together, both carefully avoided any confidential word. Bella made no explanation, and never named her husband but once, when Silence proposed to go down and give him some refreshment.

"Oh, he has taken care of himself already, trust him for that. He always takes care of himself. Why, my dear, if there is one creature in the world whom that man never forgets, it is Alexander Thomson."

No answer. None was possible. And Bella kept up her hard, gay, reckless manner, neither shedding a tear nor uttering one grateful or regretful word, all the time Silence was dressing baby. Only at the very last minute, when she saw its aunt press a last tender kiss on the poor little pinched-up face, the woman in her

could not help showing itself, even through the "grand air" which had now wholly returned to Mrs. Alexander Thomson.

"God bless you, and give you one of your own!" said she, pressing her sister's hand. "You have been very kind to me and mine, and always would have been; I know that. But it's better as it is. I couldn't stand poverty. I always did enjoy life, and I always must. He is in very good circumstances, and he promises me I shall have everything I can wish for. So good-bye, Silence; I suppose nobody is ever very happy, except you!"

Bella went downstairs, the other following, and accepting mutely her voluminous public thanks for the "great kindness" she had received, and how she hoped to come again soon to Blackhall.

"And, my dear, mind you clear out by then all Cousin Silence's old sticks, and have the house thoroughly done up, modern fashion. There is a man at Richerden who will do it well; Rody knows him. By-the-by, tell Rody"—she turned a shade paler, and her lip quivered for a moment. "No; tell him nothing, he won't care! He will be only too glad to find his house empty, and have his wife all to himself—some husbands are. Come, Mr. Thomson"—she always called him Mr. Thomson—"if we don't make haste we shall be benighted, and you will have to dine in some horrid roadside inn, which you know you couldn't stand upon any account. Good-bye, Silence; a thousand thanks, and a happy New Year! It's close at hand now. I suppose I shall dance the old year out and the new year in, as usual, at the Thomsons' house. Ta-ta! good-bye!"

She kissed her hand out of the carriage-window, and thus, in the most common-place and cheerful manner, departed with her husband, as if there had never come a cloud between them, and as if he were the best husband in the world. Not a poetical or

dramatic *dénouement*, certainly, but scarcely unnatural—to her. She was one of those who have, and must have, their good things in this life. She found them once more about her, and possibly they satisfied her; at any rate she could not do without them.

But young Mrs. Jardine, who had been poor all her days, and was a poor man's wife this day, with little prospect of ever being anything else, as she saw that splendid carriage drive away, felt almost as sad at heart as if she had been watching her sister-in-law's funeral.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GOOD NEW YEAR.

WHEN Roderick found his sister had gone, gone without even waiting to say to him, "Good-bye, and thank you," he looked grieved, but neither surprised nor angry.

"We will not judge her," was all he said. "We ought not—we that are so happy."

"But there is something beyond both happiness and misery—the question of right and wrong."

"Nevertheless, I still say, 'Judge not that ye be not judged,' especially in a question of husband and wife. Each individual case has its different aspect, which no outsider can quite understand. My darling, let us say no more about it."

And she knew by his manner that he was determined to say no more about it; so, being a wise woman, she also held her tongue.

But all that evening they seemed to breathe more freely—certainly he did—thoroughly enjoying the empty house and the quiet fireside, where there was no

need to make conversation ; but the two sat together in the sweet unreserve and complete rest of married life, as free as being alone, and yet without any of the dreariness of solitude.

“Nevertheless, I mean you to go out into ‘the world’ to-morrow night,” said Silence. “Have you forgotten the dinner at Symington ? ”

This was the New Year’s Eve party which they had discussed before Bella, and which Silence had urged him to accept, as it was half pleasure, half business. A certain “man of letters” (good old-fashioned words, and very appropriate in this case, as contradistinguished from “man of genius”) who had talked much with Roderick at the first dinner, had been rash enough to express a wish to see the rejected novel—now lying, forlorn and dust-enshrouded, on the top shelf of the old oaken press. Silence made her husband lift it down, and watched his eye brighten as he turned it over.

“‘Nothing venture, nothing win,’” said she, as she re-arranged it tenderly, and tied it up afresh. “As you say in this very book, dear, ‘take the world at its best, and it will not give you its worst ; believe in it, and it will believe in you.’”

“To convict me out of my own mouth, you traitor !” said he, laughing. He had been half inclined to hide his head at home, having grown very weary of late, in body and mind, but the light in his wife’s eyes lit up his own courage once more—he consented to do as she wished. “But you, my darling ? ”

“I shall be glad to get rid of you—I have plenty to do at home.”

“Only too much,” said he, sighing. “Tell me honestly, was your visitor a trouble to you ? ”

“Yes ; in some ways. But she could not help it, and I did not mind.”

“Why did you not tell me ? ”

She smiled in his face, with that half playful, half

tender, yet wholly determined look she had at times. "Roderick, if you think I shall inform you of all my little household affairs—you, a man, with quite enough cares of your own—you are greatly mistaken; I never shall. We will have fair division of labour: you the bread-winner, I the bread-dispenser. Did you not once tell me 'lady' was a Saxon word, and meant 'loaf-giver'? which implies that the wife should manage the house, and take care of the money. I intend to do it. I can't do your work, but I should be ashamed of myself if I could not do my own, without laying the burden of it upon you, who are—slightly incapable."

Roderick laughed outright. "My queen!—as I used to call you—you are beginning to govern in good earnest! But your husband is not afraid."

"He need not be," she said, softly, taking his hand and kissing it. "He will always be stronger and wiser than I, in his own way. And now go to your grand dinner at Symington."

Though he had not liked going, when he really was there Roderick found he liked it very much. He had always been that best type of his sex—a man whom men appreciated, even as the woman whom women are fond of is certainly the noblest kind of woman. And now that his fate was settled, his wife chosen, his home made, he took his place among men as a man and a citizen, ready to help on in the world's work, without doubts or drawbacks, and found his position both pleasant and honourable. Sure of it, and of himself, and finding himself among people who evidently neither knew nor cared how much he had a year, and whether he kept two servants or twenty, the young man's spirits rose, and he enjoyed himself heartily.

—So heartily that it was not until Lady Symington said something to him about a New Year's gift to his wife that he remembered what night it was, and how Silence was sitting alone at home. All the party were

to wait up together, Scotch fashion, to see "the old year out and the new year in," but he hastily made his adieux, and walked off, rather vexed with himself, and yet not much, since he had good news to bring home. And he knew his wife was not one of those foolish women who exact endless outside observances; she was content to lie safe in his heart, knowing that she was as completely a part of himself as that true heart which went on silently beating, keeping fresh all the springs of life, whether he ever noticed it or not.

Walking rapidly through the star-lit night, strangely mild and still, as often happens on New Year's Eve, just as though nature took a pleasure in this motionless watch over the old year that "lies a-dying," Roderick felt a softness almost like spring in the air. It seemed to stir all his young blood—he, with life all before him to will and to do. And some of the talk that night had given him a renewed impulse both as to will and deed.

"I must tell her at once. I know she will approve of it," said he to himself.

"It" was an idea started by the kindly "man of letters"—that, did Mr. Jardine's imaginative writing fail, there was a subject very popular just now, and likely to attract attention, which, with a little pains, he might examine, read up for, and write about, so as to make an excellent quarterly article, sure of at least a moderate audience. The first step on the ladder which, if taken cautiously and firmly, might lead him either by literature or politics, or both, to the very top.

"'Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall.'

Only she will never say to me—

'If thy heart fail thee, do not climb at all.'

She would keep my heart up so that I could not fall. Bless her! I am sure of that."

So thinking, he came to his own door, stepping

lightly across the grassy lawn, half in boyish mischief to look in at the parlour window—she liked to keep her light visible—and see what his wife was doing now the household had all gone to bed.

She was sitting quietly and alone, having beside her a pretty box of sandalwood, which looked like a present, for it had a Christmas card on the top. She was emptying it, layer after layer, and spreading its contents on her lap. Only little clothes—the “little clothes” that women and mothers think the prettiest in all the world. One after the other she unfolded them, putting her fingers through the tiny empty sleeves, looking at them admiringly, smilingly, and yet again with a strange sadness.

All at once Roderick called to mind what Lady Symington had said to him, and her manner of saying it; he had been full of his own affairs just then, and not noticed much else—but now, as he slipped quietly indoors, and, kneeling down beside his wife, helped her to examine her New Year’s gift—man as he was, it touched him deeply.

“And the little fellow only lived seven years, yet his mother has remembered him all this while. Poor Lady Symington!”

He said this with a curious awe, as with his slightly awkward fingers he helped his wife to re-fold the wonderful little garments, and replace them, as they had lain, untouched, for nearly forty years. Then they put the box away and sat down by the fire, hand-in-hand; and he told her of all his new hopes, new ambitions—the life that somehow seemed opening before him, if only he had strength to carry it out.

“I shall do nothing rashly. ‘Authorship,’ they say, ‘is a capital staff, but a very bad crutch.’ I shall stick to the mill at present. But you were right to send me away to-night. It does me good to have something beyond the mill, to mix with men, and feel myself one of them, with life all before me, and power

to do my work in it, with what poor old Tommy Moore calls, conceitedly,

“ ‘The mind that burns within me,
And pure smiles from thee at home.’ ”

—That quiet home smile, serene and pure, it beamed upon him now, and his whole heart was satisfied.

“This is the first New Year we ever spent together, my wife. Shall we go outside and greet it in the open air, as is our Scotch fashion? My father always did so—and my mother too—my poor mother!” he sighed.

“I wonder whether Bella’s being with us will do good or harm—whether they will be thinking of me just now? We always had a grand family gathering at Hogmanay—my two elder sisters, their husbands and children. They never cared for me much; I was a mere boy when they married. Still, to have quite forsaken me! Well, well, I wish them all a happy new year—my ‘ain folk,’ as we say in Scotland.”

Silence had no “ain folk”—only two far-away graves—but she had her husband. He and she walked up and down in front of the hall-door, talking of this and that, and especially of his work in the future, which seemed already to have taken a strong hold on his imagination, till in the dead stillness the distant stable-clock at Symington was heard beginning to strike twelve.

Until then there had not been a breath stirring, the night was so wonderfully calm and mild, and dusk rather than dark; the half-moon, slowly sloping westward behind the house, still showed faintly the belt of trees round the lawn, and even the dim outline of the distant hills. Above, the sky was *parsemé*—no English word expresses it—with myriads of stars. When the last stroke of the clock ceased, there seemed to descend from it, right down from these mysterious stars, a sough of wind, equally mysterious. It rustled through the tree-tops, wandered round the house, and

then passed away into stillness, almost like a living thing.

"Listen, listen, Roderick!"

"It is the sough of the air—the old year's last breath. I have often noticed it, and heard other people notice it too. And now—our New Year is begun. May it be a very happy one to you—to us—my darling!"

He kissed her, and then, seeing how mute and passive she was, made a little innocent joke about not being able to add the usual Scotch wish of "a happy new year, and a man afore the end on't"—because she had already got her "man," and must make the best of him, bad as he was, to the end of the chapter.

"Which is such a long way off, my love. Quite alarming. Only to think that, thirty, forty, even fifty years hence, you and I may be standing—two old people, old and grey-headed—under these very stars. I remember looking up at them this time last year, and thinking of you, and wondering if we should ever be married."

"You were 'in love' with me then; you love me now. And you will love me even when I am 'old and grey-headed,' as you say. I shall love you, Roderick, even when you are an elderly gentleman, and—not handsome at all! Nothing on earth could ever part us—nothing—nothing——"

"What is wrong, dear? Are you cold? We will go in."

"No—wait—just one minute."

He wrapped her closely in his plaid, and she nestled in his arms; but still kept gazing up, far up, into that mystic floor of heaven, which, though we see it every night of our lives, never loses its wonder, glory, and beauty.

"I should like to live to be an old woman—I should like us both to be old, and yet love one another as dearly as when we were young. It makes one feel

immortal, this love: I should like, as you say, fifty years hence, to stand with you under these stars—feeling that *nothing* could kill our love—or us. But, if things were to be different; if, this time next year, I am—not here, but away—beyond the stars!”

“What do you mean?”

She turned upon him those eyes of hers—“heavenly eyes,” he had called them since the day he first saw them on the Terrasse at Berne.

“I may die this spring. Sometimes, you know, women do.”

He shivered, but violently controlled himself.

“Yes, I know that; but—you are not afraid?”

“No, I am afraid of nothing—neither life nor death—now. And I would have died, if I might have chosen—died gladly! to have been for this one year—this one happy year—my Roderick’s wife, and his child’s mother.”

There was such a rapture in her face that whatever dread her words might have aroused in him sank down. It was one of those supreme moments when two who are wholly united, as these were, feel that no real parting is possible, that, “whatever happens” (as people say), they are one through all eternity.

“Hush!” Roderick said at last, in a broken voice. “God knows best. Let us leave it all to Him.”

And then, taking her indoors, he declared that the first of January was no time for moonlight rambles, and that he should abolish them altogether “till next summer.”

“Next summer!” repeated Silence, faintly; and then added, “Yes, yes, I *will* leave it all.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE YEAR ROLLS ON.

THE summer seemed a long way off—now ; for, as is not unusual in the north—

“As the days lengthened,
So the cold strengthened,”

and a long frost and snow shut up Silence entirely within her own peaceful home. A dull time to most people : but nothing ever seemed to make her dull. Not even when, for some weeks after Bella's departure, her husband was restless and troubled, evidently expecting some news which never came. One formal letter of thanks, announcing her safe arrival, a month after date, but explaining nothing further, was all Mrs. Alexander Thomson vouchsafed to her brother and sister. She never mentioned her mother at all.

“Evidently Blackhall is tabooed,” said he, with a bitter laugh. “Never mind, my darling. Let us give it up, and not vex ourselves about the inevitable.”

And by that she knew how, until this moment, he had not given it up : had never ceased to hope and crave for something—the one blessing which no man gets twice in a lifetime. He may have as many wives and children as fate allows ; he never can have two mothers.

But—and some mothers would do well to remember this—when a man has his wife and his home, his interests and his work, he does not mourn eternally ; as Roderick said, he “accepts the inevitable,” and turns his mind to other things. Though the young Jardines had a shut-up and rather lonely life, it was anything but an idle one. The MS. novel came back once more ;

—alas! historical novels always do come back now-a-days—but the “solid” article did not, until it had become transmuted into a bundle of those delightful proof-sheets which raise into the seventh heaven of happiness young authors, and which even old authors can hardly see without a certain thrill of pleasure, a faint reflection of the time when, as now with Roderick—

“The world was all before them, which to choose;
Reason their guard, and Providence their guide.”

And both reason and Providence seemed to have taken in charge this young author. Roderick had “no nonsense about him.” He did not start in literature with a picturesque and imaginative view of his own deservings, and how they were to be appreciated; he worked heartily at whatever came to his hand to do, and consequently he did good work. It might not have been the highest work, or the utmost he was capable of doing—Silence often thought so. But she copied his MSS., taught herself to criticize them fairly, to see all the faults she could, “in order to prevent the world from seeing them,” as she one day said.

“You see, dear, if you had to be killed, I would much rather kill you myself than let another person do it.”

At which he laughed heartily, and submitted to all fault-finding and subsequent correction with the best grace in the world.

“Who knows! Such a severe domestic critic ought to make me a celebrated author in no time. I think I will begin another *magnum opus*—not a novel, though; and by working at all leisure moments I may finish it before the year is out.”

“Before the year is out,” repeated Silence, softly. “Yes, yes; but will you not begin it now?”

And she not only got him to begin it, but she kept him steadily at it, she herself copying in the mornings

what he wrote overnight, and arranging all that he had to "read up," according to his literary friend's orders, so as to give him the least trouble possible. It was hard work, but the mill-work happened to be slack just then; and Mr. Black was very kind and friendly—touchingly so. And thus, from day to day, Roderick's time was kept full, and his mind also.

He never spoke of his mother at all now; yet he was neither dull nor melancholy. It is a remarkable fact, which people who desire to punish other people, deservedly or undeservedly, would do well to remember, that the sharpest pain cannot last for ever, and that a young couple, thoroughly happy in each other, will remain happy in spite of all their affectionate relatives, who think they ought to be miserable. Ay, and in spite of many outside things, that might have been hard in later years; but youth is the time to fight with fate—youth, with its infinite courage, its eternal hope.

Working at the mill all day, writing his book at night, with little society, for the Symingtons had gone into Edinburgh, with no relaxation except the daily walk "between the lights," which his wife insisted upon, Roderick had yet, he declared, never spent a happier three months. And he looked so well too, for it is not work that kills, but "worry;" foolish ambitions, unsatisfied cravings, jarring tempers, stinging remorse, or unrepented sin. Not mere sorrow—that can be borne. Both of these had known sorrow—she especially—but there was a holy serenity in her face now, even when one day she spoke of that grave at Neuchâtel.

"Sophie Reynier sent me these violets from it. She says they are having such a lovely spring. And so are we. Just look at those primroses, and the daffodils, all in bud already. And only listen, Roderick, how that mavis is singing!"

They were walking up and down the sheltered

kitchen-garden—lovely, though it was a kitchen-garden, with its walks all bordered by flowers, sweet old-fashioned perennials, which sprang up year by year, not disdaining the neighbourhood of the vegetables, but growing together, each after its kind, in happy union. “Like you and your poor folk,” Roderick once said, noticing how everybody loved her, and did her honour; maid-servants, mill girls, all the people about the place. “They are so kind! I have such a happy life!” was all the young mistress answered. And her fair pale face bent down over her flowers, and up again to her budding apple-blossoms, and her tall forest trees, now growing full of nest-building birds.

“That mavis, I have watched him this week past. I am sure he has a young family somewhere near. And he sings—how he does sing! in the top of that sycamore. He began the very day they planted out the hyacinths in my garden under my window.”

This, too, was a labour of love, arranged surreptitiously between Mr. Black and his old gardener—a little mathematical diagram of beds, with grass lawn between, in which had sprung up, as if by magic, successions of spring flowers, snowdrops, crocuses, hepaticas. Now, April being come, even in the dour Scotch climate, the sunshine was strengthening, and the garden brightening, every week.

“I shall have a quite beautiful nosegay presently,” she said; “just in time for my wedding day.”

He had almost forgotten it—the villain! He could hardly believe he had been married a year. And yet it felt sometimes as if they had been married all their lives, so completely had they grown into one another. It was only by an effort that either could recall their old selves, in the days when they were apart.

“That sunset” (they were watching it from a favourite seat she had—a summer-house, warm and dry, facing the southwest, and looking down the winding glen, towards the mill which, hidden by trees, only

presented a few chimney-tops, and that fairy-like column of white smoke, unobjectionable to even the most æsthetic eyes)—“that sunset,” she said, “it makes the whole sky ‘colorisé,’ as we used to say in Switzerland. Do you remember the Jungfrau and the Silberhorn that day at Berne? and the Alpes Bernoises from Lausanne? O my dear land! it is a heavenly land! I can never forget it. But this is my home.”

She had been speaking French—for a wonder; they had dropped almost entirely into English now, even when together, but she said “home”—that one dear word which we Britons specially have—with an intonation inexpressible, unmistakable. All her heart had settled into her husband’s country. “Thy people shall be my people; and thy God my God.”

Never—though Roderick Jardine may live to see thousands of sunsets, will he forget this one, or his wife’s face as she looked at it, watching it till the very last glow had died away. Then she rose.

“Now let us go in, dear.”

“Are you tired?”

“I think so.”

Leaning heavily on his arm, she went indoors; but she sat up sewing till her usual time, and rose as usual when, at a specially early hour—for he happened to have a long and busy day before him—he went off to the mill.

He was sitting in his little dingy office there, quite late in the afternoon, for he had some difficult accounts to make up, which he hated, poor fellow! not having been blessed by nature with a talent for arithmetic; but it was Roderick’s peculiarity that what he did worst he always worked hardest at, and what he particularly hated he always forced himself to do at once. His head swam, and his eyes were dazed, yet still he stuck bravely to those mountains of figures, Alp after Alp arising before his troubled brain, when he was startled by a little knock, and old Black, who he

thought had gone home two hours ago, presented himself with a beaming countenance.

"Busy? Ye're always busy! And so I thought, sir, I'd just come mysel' and be the first to give ye the good news. Laddie, laddie," with a slap on the back which contrasted oddly with the usual respectful "sir." "Go your ways, man, and thank the Lord for all His mercies. Your wife's doing well; and ye've got a bairn."

"My wife!" Roderick sprang up like a shot.

"Ou, ay, she's fine; and it's a lad-bairn. She bade Janet come and tell ye. She wadna ha'e ye fashed about it till all was over. My certie! but she's a brave woman—a woman in a thousand, is young Mrs. Jardine."

The old fellow drew out his snuff-box, took several pinches, and blew his nose with great violence, deliberately turning his back upon the young man, as perhaps was best.

"Thank God!" Roderick said at last, quietly and gravely. "Have I a son or a daughter? I forget. I did not quite hear."

"A son, sir. Another Jardine of Blackhall. They tell me—I've been up at the house mysel'—that he's such a grand bairn, and his mother is gey proud of him."

"His mother—my son—how strange it sounds!"

Roderick put his hand over his eyes, vainly trying to realize that great change in a young man's life, when he has actually "given hostages to fortune," and sees himself not merely as himself, but as the father of a race to come, who will carry down his name, laden with curses or blessings, to remote posterity. A certain momentary terror—or less terror than awe—came over him. Then, as if accepting the responsibility which no good man need fear, and which most men in their secret hearts are rather proud of, he shook hands with Mr. Black, put his account-books aside—luckily

they were nearly finished—and prepared to go home at once.

It was a wet night, had been pelting with rain all day; truly the small Jardine of Blackhall got but a weeping welcome into this “wearifu’ world.” But the young father never noticed the rain. He was fully and overpoweringly happy. The fear which half unconsciously had hung over him like a cloud for weeks, was now all changed into delicious hope and joy.

Bidding a cheery good night to Mr. Black (“By-the-by, I had a line from your wife yesterday, but that’s no matter now,” said he as they parted), Roderick walked rapidly up the brae—the familiar walk, with the light in the parlour window shining ahead all the way. It was dark now, but there was a faint glimmer from the room upstairs, his wife’s room. His heart swelled almost to bursting as he looked at it.

“My son, our son! Another Henry Jardine. If my father had only known! And my mother, shall I write to my mother? Perhaps? No!”

Choking down the pain that would rise, turning resolutely from the ever-lurking shadow which no sunshine of joy could quite banish, the young man passed through the dark garden to the hall door. Faithful Janet was there to open it; only she. All was safe now, but it had been an anxious day. The house felt quiet—painfully quiet, its master thought, as he went into the empty parlour. They would not let him speak to his wife, but only look at her as she lay asleep, like a marble image. Her eyes were closed, but a sweet smile flitted about her mouth; and her left hand was extended outside the coverlet, over a small heap, a little helpless something. What a slender soft hand it seemed, with the wedding-ring shining upon it; and yet how strong it was!—strong and tender—essentially a mother’s hand.

The young husband’s eyes were dim, but he had self-control enough to obey orders and keep quietly

downstairs, not even asking to see his little son; in truth, just then he hardly thought of him at all as a human entity, but only of the mother, the precious life imperilled, and saved. And he had known nothing—nothing, all these hours. With what silent courage had she sent him away at breakfast-time, and kept him ignorantly content at his work, all that long day—that terrible day!

“Just like her. She never thinks of herself—but of me. My darling—my only darling!”

By-and-by she awoke, and he was allowed to kiss her, without speaking; indeed, she made no attempt to speak, only smiled—her own ineffably peaceful smile. Then he settled himself in the parlour, which looked frightfully empty—all the more so that many of her things were lying about—her garden shawl and hat, which she had taken off when she came in the evening before; her work-box, her desk—carefully left open, with a little heap of addressed envelopes placed on the top of it, so as to save him all possible trouble. There were even the foreign stamps ready affixed to the Neuchâtel letters. No one at home had been forgotten; neither Mrs. Grierson, nor Lady Symington—not even Mrs. Alexander Thomson. At which Roderick again muttered, “Just like her.” But there was no letter—how could there be?—addressed to Mrs. Jardine.

“Best not,” he said, with a thrill of anger, the sharpest he had ever yet felt; “we bore all our sorrows alone—we will not make her a sharer in our joy. It is nothing to her; and she is nothing to us now.”

But, even while he said it, Roderick’s heart melted. It seemed as if, now he was a father himself, he felt all the more yearning towards his mother—the mother who bore him. Nothing could alter that fact.

With a great sigh, he sat down to his solitary supper, and prepared for an equally solitary evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THY WILL BE DONE.

HALF the night Roderick sat up, for he could not sleep, and busied himself with writing letters—in French or English—to those whom his wife loved, and who loved her, and would sympathize with her to the uttermost, he knew. Faithfully he fulfilled all her wishes—even writing a line to his sister Bella. But this, unlike the others, was brief and cold. As he did it, hot indignation, righteous indignation, flamed up in the young man's heart—he would not have been a true man else; a wrathful sense of all his darling had been made to endure—his innocent darling, whom his mother had never known, nor taken any pains to know—and whom his sisters, following her lead, had as completely ignored as if she were no wife at all. But the storm did not last long, he was of too gentle a nature; and then he was so happy, so very happy. From his calm height of content that night, he felt as if he could afford to look with placable and even compassionate eye on his whole family—on the whole world.

Until near morning he sat writing; and then, finding that all was well in the silent room upstairs, he went to bed, just looking out first upon the dim dawn—only one long yellow streak in the horizon—and thinking, if to-morrow happened to be a fine day, how pleasant all would be in his wife's room, where the sun shone almost all day long; how the hyacinths would send up their fragrant breath from the garden below, and the mavis, her own particular mavis, would sing his incessant song "from morn till dewy eve," over his busy mate and newly-hatched young. All the

world seemed full of life, and joy, and hope. He had to cover his ears ere he could get to sleep, for the birds were already awake and singing so loud.

An hour or two's rest, and Roderick was up again—half dizzy with his unbelievable new joy, and trying hard to talk business with Mr. Black, who had come to Blackhall himself to get the earliest news, and persuade the young father to escape from the ignominious position of total neglect which befalls all fathers under these happy circumstances, and take refuge in "bachelors' hall." Directly after, there drove up the Symington carriage, with Lady Symington in it, who straightway disappeared upstairs.

When she came down, her round, rosy face was pale, and her manner painfully quiet. She offered no congratulations, but laid her hand on Roderick's arm.

"I have been up seeing your wife. Have you seen her this morning?"

"Not yet. They would not let me."

"Quite right. Stop! You must not go to her just now. Instead, take my carriage and fetch Dr. ——."

Roderick in his turn became ghastly pale—for this doctor was the most noted man in all the countryside, and he lived twelve miles off.

"Is there, then, such vital necessity? Is she in danger? Why did they not tell me? O, my God! my God!"

"Hush! we must not waste time in talking. It may be nothing, my dear"—the old lady's soft "my dear" was more terrifying than aught else,—“but we never know. The horses are fresh—they will go there and back without stopping. Bring the doctor with you—don't come without him. I will stay here till you return.”

She spoke briefly, almost sharply, but with the calm decision that re-assures even while it alarms.

Without a word Roderick obeyed; allowed Mr. Black, who had listened in silence, to give him his

hat and coat, and throw a plaid into the carriage after him.

"Will you not go too, Mr. Black? You had better. He is quite stann'd, you see."

"Yes, my lady; but I know him—he's a brave lad, he will bear up alone. And I must go elsewhere."

The old man grasped the young man's hand with a sudden "God bless you!"—then Roderick sprang into the carriage and drove away.

Oh, that awful drive! sitting like a stone, watching mechanically the trees and moors and hills slip by—his watch in one hand, counting the half-hours—no, the very minutes, as they crawled along; in the other hand clutching Lady Symington's note, ready to be given to the doctor as soon as he could be found.

And then the drive back, with the "celebrated" man—to whom "the case" was only a case, and who talked cleverly and cheerfully and indifferently of that and many other things, till he saw he was scarcely heard, and then, with a natural human sympathy for the white set face beside him, dropped into silence and a book:—for years Roderick never saw the title of that book without a shudder.

A "ray of hope" he learnt there was. Only a ray! and three hours before the whole world had seemed to him to be flooded with sunshine. He asked no questions—made no remarks. Mute and unappealing he sat, half-stunned, half-blind, like a man who has suddenly received sentence of death—death utterly undeserved and unexpected—death in the very midst of life, so that reason refuses to take it in as a reality, and the mind is conscious of neither terror nor pain, only a dull sense of something having happened, or being about to happen, which one can no more escape than one can escape from the falling rock or the advancing breaker, both of which will bring certain and instantaneous doom.

They reached Blackhall, and he heard at the front

door the doctor's question, "Is she alive?" and Lady Symington's affirmative answer; then he staggered in, and Janet had to fetch her master a glass of water, and put him into the arm-chair, quite dizzy and blind.

But he soon recovered himself, and went back to listen at the foot of the staircase.

"It will be a hard fight—a hand-to-hand fight—but we'll beat, I trust," the doctor was saying, with a thoroughly professional look on his clever face, and a gleam of his keen eyes, often seen in men like him, when they brace up all their skill to do battle with the great enemy. Then he and Lady Symington both vanished, and Roderick was left alone.

Hour after hour he sat—no one coming near him. Once Janet knocked at the parlour-door, and asked if she might bring in baby, whose crying disturbed the mother. Roderick assented, but took no notice of his son; indeed, at the moment, he almost felt as if he hated him. Kind Janet was the only person who paid the least attention to the young heir of Blackhall.

Never, never will little Henry's father forget that day—a lovely April day, half storm, half sunshine, towards evening wholly sunshine. But Roderick turned from it and hid his eyes. And that mad bird, that loud-voiced mavis, singing incessantly in the sycamore-tree—he covered his ears to deaden the sound. All the sound he cared to hear—and his very soul seemed concentrated in listening—was the moving of feet in that room upstairs, where the terrible battle for life was going on, and during which he seemed himself to be dying a hundred deaths.

He did nothing, absolutely nothing, hour after hour—what was there for him to do? Once, catching sight of the pile of letters—those happy letters, which nobody had thought of posting—he rose mechanically, in order to put them away somewhere, and looking about found his wife's work-basket, just as she had left it the needle still sticking in the unfinished frill.

Would it ever be finished? With a gasp, and a wild stare round, as if to call to her—to appeal to her—she, who had never before forsaken him thus, been missing when he wanted her, or silent when he called—he seized and kissed it. Then he put everything in its place again, including her garden-shawl, which he folded up with his helpless hands, as tenderly as if it had been a living thing, and sat down again in the same chair, with his head dropped on his hands.

Presently, he had to rouse himself and speak a few common-place words to Sir John, who came to fetch Lady Symington home to dinner: people must dine—and the dear old lady looked quite exhausted. She went up to Roderick and kissed him—bade him hope still—while there was life there was hope; but nevertheless urged upon him that last solemn prayer, which often seems to bring back the very blessing it resigns —“Thy will be done.”

“I can’t say it—I can’t!” he answered—the young man to whom anguish—such anguish as this—was utterly unknown. But after she had left, promising to come again before midnight, he fell down on his knees, and in an agony such as he had not believed any man could pass through and live—he said it.

After that he seemed to grow quieter, and ready to accept everything.

By-and-by the doctor came down to him for a minute, with an anxious face but a cheery voice.

“Take heart, my dear fellow. As I said, while there’s life there’s hope. Do not go near her—quite useless, as she knows nobody. By-and-by I’ll fetch you, should there come a change.”

“A change? For the better?”

“Yes. Or what they call a lightening before death.”

Death—and her! The two ideas seemed impossible—irreconcilable. Shuddering, Roderick turned away from the old man, who did not mean to be cruel, who

even put his hand kindly on the young fellow's shoulder and again bade him "keep up," that all was being done which could be done, that he had seen many a worse case; and so on, and so on. But Roderick heard it all as one in a dream, and directly afterwards, hearing the sound of a carriage, and believing it was only old Black—faithful old Black!—who always meant well, but the sight of whom would almost madden him just then, he bolted out of the low window, and went and hid himself in the darkest depths of the glen.

When he ventured back into the house the fire had died out—only a solitary candle was left burning on the table. He stole upstairs, and listened at his wife's door. All was quiet. There was not even the sound of the doctor's quick, resolute voice: he must have gone away.

Then all hope died out of Roderick's heart. Groping his way back to the parlour, he sat down in his old seat, waiting in a sort of stupefaction for the final blow, and repeating to himself over and over again a line which seemed persistently to "beat time to nothing" in his overstrained brain—Othello's oiteous moan—

"My wife? What wife? O God! I have no wife!"

Perhaps even now he, too, had no wife. All the sweet days were over, her brief happiness was ended, her young life done. And he?

Such a loss is a common story. Many a young man had lived through it—lived long after it—perhaps won another wife, and had many other children, and been very happy apparently; but I question if ever he is quite the man he was before, and I think he would hardly be a true man if some little bit of his heart was not for ever buried in his dead wife's grave.

The candle burnt itself out, and the moonlight, creeping in between the undrawn curtain, was beginning to fill the room with a pale, ghostly light, when

Roderick heard the door open, and some one enter very gently and hesitatingly.

"Well?" he said, not lifting his head—not doubting it was the summons of doom.

No answer; but the intruder came close to him—touched him.

"Who's that?" he said, almost fiercely; "who's that?"

"It's me, Rody: it's your mother."

"Oh, mother, mother!"

For one moment her arms were round his neck and his head on her shoulder. Then he thrust her violently away.

"I don't want my mother; I want my wife! What of my wife! Is she alive?"

"Yes. And she will live. And I thought I'd be the first to come and tell you. Do you hear, Rody? she's safe—quite safe. Both doctors say so. Thank God! thank God! Oh, Rody, my son, my son!"

Once more she opened to him those fond mother-arms which no man can resist—no man ought to resist, and let him sob his heart out there, patting him, kissing him, treating him almost as if he had been a little child, and sobbing herself the while, with undisguised, uncontrollable emotion.

"How did you come, mother? Since when have you been here?"

"Ever so long, my dear."

"I was never told."

"No; I went up straight to her. It did not harm her, she knew nobody. The doctor is a friend of mine, he let me be with her. He knew I understood. I nearly died myself when you were born. Oh, Rody, what you must have suffered this day! Let me look at you, my boy—my dearest boy!"

It was a sorrowful gaze for both mother and son. Gradually Roderick's manner hardened, and he loosed himself from her clinging hands.

"Never mind me, it is my wife we must think about. I beg your pardon, mother, but I must go and see her, my wife whom you hate, whom you were so cruel to. But I love her. She is more to me than anything or anybody in this world. I don't know why you come here. I never asked you to come. Still I thank you for coming. But there is not the least occasion for you to stay."

He rose up, with his cold, proud manner, so like his father's. His mother, half frightened, as if she thought he hardly knew what he was about—perhaps he did not, poor fellow!—stood before him, silently wringing her hands.

"I repeat—there is no need for you to trouble yourself about us in any way. If my wife lives, and you say she will live, she and I are quite sufficient to one another. Will you sit down? Can I get you anything? Or shall I order a carriage that you may go home at once?"

"Oh, Rody—Rody! Me—your mother."

She burst into tears, such tears as it is terrible to see an old woman shed.

And Mrs. Jardine was an old woman now. The struggle between her heart—and it was a good honest heart after all—and her fierce indomitable will, had told upon her severely. Could her son have seen her face he might have traced there the wrinkles of many added years. As it was he felt that the hand which grasped him shook as with palsy.

"Rody, I wish just to say one word."

Could a son expect his mother to beg his pardon? Would he not have been an unworthy son to have let her do any such thing? Was it not far better, for him, under the circumstances—under any circumstances—to have done—just what he did?

He dropped on his knees beside her, and laid his head in her lap, exactly as when he was her little boy.

"Mother, mother, forgive me! Let us forgive one another."

“Oh, yes—yes! Come back to me, my son—my only son!”

There was no other apology or explanation than this, neither now, nor at any future time, between them. Both avoided it, and so best. It is always safer not to touch a half-healed wound. Besides, we are none of us perfect, God knows; and some of us see our faults all the plainer when no one points them out, but they are left entirely between ourselves and Him.

“And now,” said Roderick, anxiously, “tell me about my wife!”

“Poor lamb—poor lamb! I have been with her these two hours. She thought it was her own mother, for she spoke a few words in French and called me ‘mamma.’ Tell her, Rody, that——”

Mrs. Jardine turned away, and again burst into honest, irrepressible tears.

“But still, mother, how did you come—how did you hear?”

She could not speak, but she put into his hand a little note, dated two days before, written in pencil, and in a hand very feeble, very shaky, but neat and clear.

“DEAR MR. BLACK,

“If you should hear I am likely to die, will you go at once to Richerden and fetch Mrs. Jardine? You know her. No one will comfort my husband like his mother.

“Yours truly,

“SILENCE JARDINE.”

“And now,” said Mrs. Jardine, smiling through her tears, the brightest, sweetest smile, Roderick thought, that he had ever seen on her face, “go you to your wife, and let me go to my grandson. My son will not now want his mother to comfort him—thank the Lord!”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IS IT THE END?

A WARM, honest heart and a generous nature will cover a multitude of sins—or let us say errors—especially in a grandmamma. Over that baby's cradle the hearts of the two women, young Mrs. Jardine and old Mrs. Jardine, soon came to meet in the most wonderful way; as they met, too, over another thing, or rather person—often an endless “bone of contention” between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law when they happen to be weak, selfish, or jealous women, which these were not—the man whom each loved best of all the world.

Roderick's wife and mother, however opposite their characters, had certain points in common, out of which grew an unmistakeable sympathy—namely, strength of will and thoroughness of purpose, great sincerity and affectionateness, the power of self-devotion, and an entire absence of that petty egotism which is always on the watch to guard its own rights, and has no vision for anybody's rights except its own. Besides, meeting her son afresh, as it were, with that great gulf of sorrow between, which had sorely changed both him and her, and, finding him now a man—a husband and a father—in many ways very different from the “boy” she had been accustomed to think him, Mrs. Jardine had the sense to accept her position and make the best of it.

For her son's wife—the “poor lamb,” as she had called her, and whom, as Roderick afterwards found out, her good sense, firmness, and devoted care, coming in at the last ebb of hope, had greatly contributed to save from death—Mrs. Jardine took to loving her, as strong natures are prone to love those whom they have saved, and who depend upon them,

as for many days Silence had to depend upon her practical and sensible mother-in-law, in that total, sweet helplessness which was the very best thing to win the old woman's heart.

She was an old woman now—no doubt about it; and years ripen and sweeten many women to an almost incredible degree. Besides, as Silence often whispered to her husband when little things jarred upon him and irritated him, she was his mother, and she loved him—in her own odd way, perhaps, but with a love of which there could be no doubt and no denial. Still even love can work no miracles, nor blend together opposing natures, characters, and lives into sudden and everlasting harmony; and when, having nursed her “child” as she called Silence, into comparative health, and given her grandchild his grandfather's name, Mrs. Jardine proposed to go home, earnestly begging her son to leave Blackhall, and come and settle in Richerden—Roderick gently but steadily declined. He did not say so, even to his own wife; but he felt it would be far better that he should continue to live at Blackhall and his mother and sisters at Richerden.

All, and especially Bella, were “quite well and happy,” Mrs. Jardine said. How much she knew of the events of last Christmas; or the differences between Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson, did not transpire. At all events, she never talked about these troubles: it was not “respectable.”

But, despite their diverse way of viewing things, there was a straightforwardness and right-heartedness about Roderick's mother, which, when her son saw it with fresh, clear eyes, and especially through his wife's eyes, sufficed to blind him wholesomely to her faults. No fear of any more “difficulties” to the end of their days. And when, the last Sunday she was with him, he went, a little against his will, but just to please her, to the ugly Presbyterian church six miles

off, and, sitting between his wife and his mother, listened to the singing, rather nasal and drawling, but not unsweet, of the twenty-third Psalm—

“My table Thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head with oil Thou dost anoint,
And my cup overflows,”

his heart melted, for he felt his cup did indeed “overflow.”

His “table,” too, was likely to be “furnished”—better than he had once had any hope of. When his mother spoke of business matters, and insisted on his giving up his work at the mill, and living as a “gentleman,” he had refused point-blank, declaring his determination to carve out his own fortune, and make his own independent way in the world. But when, on the day of baby’s christening, he found that Mrs. Jardine, who never did things by halves, and was as generous in her loves as ungenerous in her dislikes, had settled upon baby’s mother—not father—a sum of several thousand pounds—sufficient to remove all fear of the future from the parents’ hearts, Roderick was deeply moved.

“She is a good woman—my mother! My father was right to respect her and love her—as he did, to the very last. God bless them! I have need to be proud of both my parents.”

“Yes,” said Silence, gently, as she stooped and kissed her son, who lay fast asleep on her lap. But her own life taught her to understand other lives: what they were, and what they might have been.

And her life is all before her still, for she is yet comparatively a young woman, though her boys—and she has several—begin to measure heights with her, and to reckon how soon they will be “up to mother’s shoulder.” “Father” is a standard which none of them hope to arrive at, either physically, mentally, or

morally. To be so tall, so clever, or so good as he—none of these lads could ever imagine such a thing. They do not merely love him, they adore him. And they are right! or at least two people, their mother and their grandmother, believe so.

Roderick Jardine lives still at Blackhall, keeping up the old family home in comfort, but yet in great simplicity, as is wisest, with his increasing family. Besides, his early experiences have given him a horror of luxury, of that wealth which is mere wealth and nothing more. The Jardines of Blackhall hold themselves to be truly “rich” people, because they always have a little more than they spend; they use their money without abusing it, and therefore enjoy it to the uttermost, and cause others besides themselves to enjoy it too. But their sons are all brought up to abhor extravagance, waste, or self-indulgence, aware that each will have to make his own way in the world, as is best for every man, and woman, too, perhaps. Sometimes Roderick says, if he had many girls he would bring them up, like the boys, to earn their own living—as their mother once did—so that they might taste the sweetness of independent bread, and never be tempted to marry for aught but love. But he has only one girl, his little “Tacita”—her right name is Silence, though he will not have her called so. They say it is “one of papa’s odd ways”—Roderick will have a good many “odd ways” as he grows older.

He may never be, strictly speaking, a “great” man, but everybody recognizes him as a man of very considerable talent—“known in the gates,” as his wife delightedly sees, every year more and more; though by his pen rather than his personality, for he seldom goes from home, except once a year to Richerden to see his mother and the family. A not too attractive family; still he is very kind to them, even to Mrs. Alexander Thomson and her numerous brood of sickly, ill-tempered children, whom she brings with her

sometimes to get a breath of wholesome life, within and without, in the happy atmosphere of Blackhall.

"Young Mrs. Jardine," as she continues to be called, for old Mrs. Jardine may live to be ninety, still looks so young, so fair! her peaceful, contented heart shining through her "heavenly" eyes. The world has never heard of her, never will hear, except through her husband and her sons. She does not greatly "shine in society," though she is well able to keep up the dignity of the family wherever she goes. But of her own dignity, her own praise, she thinks very little; having, indeed, far too many other and more important things to think about. As wife, as mother, as mistress, her burdens are often pretty heavy, but never more than she can bear. And he helps her, as she helps him—the husband of her youth; who will, please God, be the faithfullest, fondest lover of her old age.

That time is still a good way off, and they may yet have much to bear together. They will bear it, because it is borne together. And I think, if any one were to ask Roderick Jardine what has been—in plain English—the backbone of his life, his preservation from evil, his incentive to all good, he would say it was that strong first love and venturous early marriage; because he had sense to see and to take hold of the blessing that heaven dropped in his path—that treasure "above rubies" which many men desire, few win, and fewer still deserve to win. He says, sometimes, that he should like to have carved on his tombstone, as the root of all his happiness, all his success, that line, written by one great and good man of another—perhaps the noblest man of this century—

"Who loved one woman, and who claved to her."

"But," he adds, "it was because that woman was Silence Jardine."

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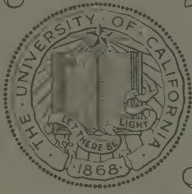


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